

# The Wake of the Setting Sun

William Averill Stowell



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# THE WAKE OF THE SETTING SUN

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WILLIAM AVERILL STOWELL







[page 238]

"IT'S TOO FAR," HE MUTTERED.

# THE WAKE OF THE SETTING SUN

BY

WILLIAM AVERILL STOWELL



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# CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. WHERE THE WEST BEGINS . . .	9
II. DOWN GRADE . . . . .	16
III. THE DAUGHTER OF THE DE LA GUERRAS . . . . .	22
IV. WHEN THE LIMITED PULLED IN	33
V. DOWN THE HARBOR . . . . .	44
VI. THE CHASE TOWARDS THE SUN . .	54
VII. OUT OF THE FRYING PAN . . .	69
VIII. CORONA DEL MAR . . . . .	83
IX. THE HACIENDA . . . . .	95
X. THE WHISPERED WHISTLE . .	109
XI. A BLOW FROM THE UNKNOWN .	118
XII. DR. LETHBRIDGE MAKES AN UNEX- PECTED DIAGNOSIS . . . . .	129
XIII. A PIECE OF FISHLINE . . . .	141

## CONTENTS

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CHAPTER	PAGE
XIV. B. G. . . . .	149
XV. THE QUARREL IN THE DINING ROOM . . . . .	157
XVI. IN THE SHADOW OF THE GIANTS .	171
XVII. THE RED MEMORANDUM . . .	179
XVIII. THE OWNER OF THE FISHLINE .	185
XIX. THE ATTACK IN THE DARK . .	194
XX. GONE . . . . .	199
XXI. BAD BLOOD . . . . .	207
XXII. THE CUFF ON THE FLAGSTONES .	224
XXIII. THE END OF A BLIND TRAIL . .	229
XXIV. THE PAINTED CAVE . . . .	240
XXV. SHOT THROUGH THE WALL . .	248
XXVI. THE CLIMB TO THE SUN . . .	259
XXVII. THE RACE FOR THE TAR FIELD .	274
XXVIII. THE FIGHT IN THE CAÑON . .	283
XXIX. THE FATE OF A DESPERATE CHANCE . . . . .	292
XXX. THE WAKE OF THE SETTING SUN	299

*Out where the skies are a trifle bluer,  
Out where friendship's a little truer,  
That's where the West begins.  
Out where a fresher breeze is blowing,  
Where there's laughter in every streamlet  
flowing,  
Where there's more of reaping and less of  
sowing,  
That's where the West begins.*

ARTHUR CHAPMAN





# THE WAKE OF THE SETTING SUN

## CHAPTER I

### WHERE THE WEST BEGINS

LOWER TWELVE gave a grunt of relief when, after breakfast, "they" trooped out on the platform. Not that Lower Twelve was neurasthenic or even oversensitive; only, after all, a Pullman crammed with personally conducted schoolma'ams was not what a Just Providence should have inflicted on six feet of rugged, world-hardened man. By night, their whisperings and suppressed giggles had irritated his habitually peaceful slumbers; while, by day, the train despatcher voice of their guide had blurred the memories of days gone by, when prairie schooners creaked along the winding western trails and Indian braves were more than local color spread over the sta-

tion platforms by an enterprising railroad company.

As the powerful engine, with a sympathetic snort, shook itself and continued on its long pull to the Pacific, Lethbridge sprawled his wiry muscular frame over the entire section of the now deserted car.

Above the shimmering desert that swept away to the brown scarred mountains on the horizon, a haze of purple hung. Gradually the rumble, rumble of the wheels soothed his senses and, for he knew not for how long, he lay with half-seeing eyes, contentedly dreaming of his journey's end and of his chum Bill Lawton awaiting him at San Diego for a month's deep-sea fishing.

With an upward jerk of his head, Lethbridge straightened himself in his seat, ran his hand through his curly brown hair, and rubbed his eyes into a consciousness of his surroundings. Evidently he had been dozing for some time for the atmosphere was soaked with heat. Feeling in his pocket for his pipe, he arose, stretched himself and wandered back between the seats. As he came out on to the platform, he gave an

## *WHERE THE WEST BEGINS*

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exclamation of disappointment. Instead of his car being at the end of the train, another Pullman had been switched on at the last station and a chain across its vestibule barred his further progress. With a shrug of his shoulders, he undid the obstruction, then carefully replaced the hook and went on back through the car. Evidently it was an observation Pullman, quite deserted, probably some "empty" picked up back there for hauling to the terminal. Hurrying through the stifling salon, Lethbridge unfastened the rear door and stepped out on the observation platform. While sizzling, the air outside was fresh, full of the ozone of the desert, and the sand, whirled up by the suction of the onrushing train, seethed by without finding its way around the sides.

Lurching into a camp chair, he installed his feet against the brass railing and puffed contentedly at his beloved brier. After all, it was a relief to be free from the grind of the laboratory, the first vacation since his appointment as research director of the great New York hospital. Away to the jagged, purple mountains on the horizon stretched the broken expanse

of sand, streaked with red and ocher, daubed with grayish green, covered with a yellow veil of dust and sunbeams that softened its rugged outlines and cast a spell of mystery over the dissolving distances. No sound arose to relieve the terrifying quiet of this lonely land, like the grim, deserted landscape of a dying world or the silent surface of the earth before the beginning of things. Lulled by the rhythmical click, click of the swiftly receding rails, Lethbridge was again slipping into semidreaminess when he was recalled to a sense of reality by the rusty squeak of the heavy door and the sudden appearance beside him of a young woman. For a moment the newcomer hesitated, bracing herself against the sharp swaying of the train, perhaps sensing the disconsolate opposition to her presence on the part of the serious, firm-jawed man in the corner. Then, with a slight toss of a mutinous head, she sank into the camp chair on the opposite side of the platform, performed the sacred feminine rite of adjusting her skirts, and settled back with a little sigh of content to enjoy the grandeur of the narrow gorge up which the train was now crawling.



With a resentful rap, the doctor emptied his pipe over the railing, pulled down the visor of his cap and prepared to relinquish possession to the intruder who, like himself, had evidently disregarded the chain. The thought of the dust-filled heat within caused him, however, to settle back again grumblingly in his seat. Where could this woman have come from? Probably from the Pullman ahead, for his car had been absolutely empty since leaving the last stop. Obviously she was not one of the schoolma'ams. A nonchalant and indifferent glance brought certainty that no Kansas school board would ever have passed the striking, foreign-looking girl opposite. Unconsciously Lethbridge set himself for the usual remark about the scenery that he knew would presently be thrown at him, an opening to a silly, boring conversation not easily choked off. An unbroken silence of a quarter of an hour made him shift uneasily in his seat. Something was wrong. There came to his mind a play he had once seen, *The Man Who Married a Dumb Wife*. Yes, but then such things only happened in plays. Casually, with a purely psychological interest, he studied



more closely the girl opposite, who sat in genuine obliviousness of his existence and was evidently really absorbed in the towering cliff walls of the cañon and in the rocky river bed falling away far below.

His professional eye was forced to admit that she was a splendid type. Above medium height, her resilient, supple figure suggested the lithe grace of a pantheress; while the finely molded oval face, the massive soft hair coiled above the coral-pink ears, the eyes warm brown with streaks of beaten gold, all confirmed Dr. Lethbridge's first impression that the woman opposite was a dangerous specimen of a much to-be-avoided sex.

The train was still slowly crawling up the narrow, winding defile between the mountains, through which the river had gnawed its passage to the sea. Up the steep grade the straining engine struggled, gasping like an old wind-broken horse as the wheels slipped their footing and spun round in a mad whirl. The track crawled and wound around the precipitous cliffs of the cañon, which rose on the left in a jagged line to the rim and on the right fell sheer

## *WHERE THE WEST BEGINS*

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into the bouldered river bed below. Gradually the light, previously obscured by the towering cliffs, grew brighter and the engine with a pant of relief reached the top of the divide and ran out into the sunshine of the summit. Suddenly, with a slight jerk, Lethbridge perceived that the train had gradually slackened its speed, then stopped quite still, then had begun to glide gently backward. Rising to his feet, he peered around the corner of the platform. Two hundred yards up the track the rear end of the train was disappearing over the brow of the ridge, while their observation Pullman, broken loose from the main body of the train, was smoothly slipping backwards down the grade.

## CHAPTER II

### DOWN GRADE

**T**HE air was still, blanketed under the crushing silence of the sultry noon. From far below floated the echo of the cañon softened by the great height into a soothing, musical murmur. For a flash Lethbridge stood undecided. Then, slamming open the screen door, he dashed back through the car. The atmosphere inside was oppressive. Around the edges of the drawn shades wavering shafts of sunlight filtered through in dust-filled paths. As he ran between the deserted sections his steps sounded hollow and dulled. Bursting out on what was now the rear platform, he brought up short, gripping the sides to keep from pitching head first out on to the receding track. Evidently the Pullman was quite deserted. Turning, he was starting back, when he hesitated, wavered a moment, then straddled the rear railing and crouched to spring. After all, a broken

leg was to be preferred to a journey in this runaway car, now rocking jerkily as it shot faster down the rails.

His fingers were loosening their grasp, he was swinging out on to the flying ties, when there came to him the thought of the girl on the platform ahead. Struggling to get his balance, his fingers gripped the cold steel bar and, with a muttered exclamation, he vaulted the low railing and started forward.

Clutching the backs of the seats, pitched from side to side, he fought his way up the narrow aisle. Half across the writing salon, he was slammed against the desk with a force that made him strangle. He could see the girl outside frantically pulling on the handle of the heavy door. Evidently the snap had sprung when he had slammed it on his way forward. Crawling to his knees, he slipped the catch, rose, and lurched out on to the observation platform. As the girl stood back, a shadow of relief, of gratitude passed across her eyes. Holding to the railing, Lethbridge bent over her.

“We’re alone on this car!” he shouted. “It’s broken away from the rest of the train!”



His words were stifled by the rush of the wind and he wondered if she had heard. She was looking to the left now, over the sheer granite wall, down to where the river bed lay white in the silent distance. Suddenly she turned to him and her lips moved; but no sound came to his ears, for, as she spoke, the car struck a sharp curve where the cañon bore left and they were hurled in a heap into the opposite corner of the platform. A hissing, a ripping creak of strained bolts; the Pullman swayed, staggered, held the rails by a miracle, and shot out on to a half mile of track that fell away straight before them.

With a struggle the man raised himself and helped his companion to her knees. As he braced himself, he drew in his breath sharply between his teeth and pointed ahead. At the end of the straight half mile the rails, clamped like a scaffolding, crawled to the right around the sharp elbow of the cañon wall. Following his gesture, the girl turned gravely to him, gave a quaint shrug of her shoulders, then looked straight ahead. The car was running smoothly now, clipping over the rails with the rhythm of a well-oiled reel. To the man it recalled his



boyhood when he had run a stick rapidly along the pales of a fence. All at once he felt a hand grip his arm.

“Oh, señor!” the voice sounded tense, strained. “Is there nothing we can do?”

Her words seemed to whip his numbed faculties into action, to make him see for the first time the long brass brake lever thrown back against the railing. With a muttered exclamation of disgust at himself, he reached forward and gripped the handle.

Squaring his shoulders, he gradually pulled the bar. Somewhere beneath, the clamps whistled shrilly as they brushed the wheels. But such gentle pressure could not check their whirling. Leaning far back, the man threw against the brake-beam all his strength. Under his pongee coat the knotted muscles bulged in bunches and the cords of his neck showed in bluish lines beneath the turkey-red skin. There was a jerky bumping, a sputtering of sparks, the pungent smell of burning steel.

“Thank God!” he gasped hoarsely. “They’re holding!”

As he spoke, something snapped and he was

thrown heavily against the door. The brake-chain had broken and the great car, with a burst of joyous freedom, leapt forward down the track. The rim was but a hundred yards ahead now, pitching off sheer where the road bent round the cliff. On the right the granite walls flew by with the dull, hollow roar of an approaching hurricane. On the left, down in the gloom of the great gorge, dull gray boulders stuck upward their hungry heads. Bleeding from a cut over his eye, Lethbridge staggered to his feet; then stooped beside the huddled figure in the corner.

“It’s our only chance!” he shouted.

Her arms clung to his neck with a tense force that almost choked him. He could feel her breath coming in quick gasps. Then, as he straddled the rail and crouched to jump, her grip grew laxer and to his ear came the words of the old Spanish prayer:

“Holy Mary Mother, help us!”

With a smash of ripping steel the Pullman struck the curve and shot straight out across the cañon. First twisting in a gentle spiral, then hurtling over and over, it fell and fell;

## *DOWN GRADE*

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until from up out of the great depths came a faint, shattering crash as it struck on the rocks below. But as the long, black mass pitched into space, the man had gripped his burden tightly and jumped. For a moment there flowed through him an exhilarating sense of detachment, of carefree soaring through the soft air; then, a stabbing pain, a numbing ringing of distant bells, a myriad of flashing motes of light; then, darkness, the blackness of oblivion.

## CHAPTER III

### THE DAUGHTER OF THE DE LA GUERRAS

**T**O the man on the sofa of the drawing-room came a monotonous drumming as of a bevy of partridges, carried from afar on a clear, crisp winter's morning; a sensation of being wafted hither and fro like a wisp of thistle on a fitful summer's breeze; a tumbling froth of half-seen images whirling past the screen of clouded consciousness; then, as the focus became sharper, the impression of a rope overhead swaying back and forth, of a worker in hammered brass beating with steady strokes upon his throbbing head. From a distance came the strident hoot of a locomotive. The steady rumble of the train was lulling him to sleep but for that accursed metal-worker chiseling out his brain. If he would only stop! With a groan the man raised his hand to push away the disturber. Something warm and soft gripped his

## *DAUGHTER OF THE DE LA GUERRAS*

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wrists and from afar, so far, came the words:

“Please, señor, you must lie still!”

Where had he heard that voice? Slowly opening his eyes, Lethbridge fought to seize again connection with reality. Surely he had seen those eyes whose dark pupils streaked with gold were looking through a veil of mist. Why was she crying, this girl holding his wrists to his sides? Oh yes! He had it now! The crash! Yes, this was the girl! How stupid not to remember! He must have been hurt! That was why his head pounded so! With a sigh Lethbridge lay back exhausted. Again from far away came the same soft, foreign voice with a break in its melody.

“Oh! Conductor! He has come back to us. Thank God he has come back!”

Then a gruff, kindly growl:

“There now, miss, of course he has! You can’t squash the life out of a young feller like that, even with what you two went through.”

A minute, an hour, he must have dozed again. The girl was still there; the conductor had gone. His brain was clear now. He tried to raise himself on his elbow. Wincing, he lay back



once more. It must have been a sharp knock. Opening his eyes, he smiled faintly up into the anxious face leaning over him:

“Don’t worry!” he said. “I’ll be all right in a minute.”

“But you must lie still! Really, my señor, you must!”

For a time he lay on his back, motionless, following the swinging bell rope. Finally he raised his head on the pillow:

“Please!” he said. “Tell me what happened! I don’t remember anything after we jumped.”

“Then rest back, so.” She carefully arranged the pillow and her firm fingers lowered his head against its soft cushion.

“Well, the conductor who was here just now said that that observation car had been in a wreck a few days ago and had broken its coupler and air-brakes. At a station we came to last night, they had patched up the coupler and had hitched the car to our train to haul to the shops to be repaired. But they could not fix the air-brake, and, when the coupler again broke going up that terrible cañon, the car just slipped down the grade. The conductor blames us for going

into it, as the chain was put across to keep people out."

"What happened when we jumped?" Alan asked.

"We struck some soft sand beside the track that the conductor said was put there to fix the roadbed. Only, your head hit a small stone and it made you go to sleep."

"How long have I been unconscious?"

"A long time. We have just started again."

"How about yourself? Weren't you hurt?"

"Not much, for I fell on you. Just shaken a little, so that I too knew not where I was and woke up just as the train backed down and they were carrying me into this stateroom which is mine."

"Did the car go over into the river?"

"Yes! As they carried me along the track I could see it lying 'way down in that cañon. It was horrible, and please let us forget it. Only I shall not forget, señor, what you have done for me." And, taking his hand in both her own, the girl lightly brushed it with her lips.

"Please!" Alan sat bolt upright, his face crimson.

“But, señor,” she looked at him in surprise. “I was just trying to show you that I give you thanks for what you did for me. For is it not because of you that I am here?”

Alan bit his lip. Why had he been such a boor? As she sat with her eyes lowered, busied with soaking in a pail of ice water the towel for his head, he tried to catch sight of her face. Perhaps it was imagination, but was not her mouth twitching as though some invisible sprite was drawing a straw around its corners? Evidently the girl was laughing at him.

“You are very kind to do all this for me,” he said gruffly, “but I can fix things now myself. Really, I feel much better.”

The golden streaks flashed under the long lashes as she held her head to one side to survey her work. Then, making her face solemn, she bent forward:

“You must know, my friend,” she declared impressively, “that I have promised to bathe your head every half-hour. And, even though you do not wish me here, I must keep my promise. Not so?”

For a while the man lay back on the pillow,

his eyes closed, stealing now and then through furtively opened lids a glance at the girl by his side. Her head was turned from him and his gaze kept seeking the soft curve of the back of her neck where it joined the hair in a sweeping, graceful line. So close she was to him that the warm breeze coming through the open window carried to his nostrils the delicious perfume of her self, subtle, mysterious. At six she went ahead to the diner, promising to bring him back his supper. He heaved a sigh of relief to get her out of the way, sneaked out his tobacco pouch and prepared to enjoy a moment of solitary peace. Somehow, although his head was better, his pipe did not taste just as it usually did and his eyes kept constantly glancing at the stateroom door. Where was the girl? Why didn't she come? Women were as hard to know as melons, anyway, and this one was probably dawdling over her meal just to aggravate him. By the time a half hour had dragged away, he had worked himself into a state of sulky neglect and was thinking of some especially cutting remark when, of a sudden, she appeared in the doorway with a tray of eggs and toast and tea.



## *THE WAKE OF THE SETTING SUN*

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Her coming thawed the icy sarcasm he had so carefully prepared, and he grunted his appreciation and moved over by the window. When she had arranged the pillow behind his back, salted and peppered his eggs, and discovered that he took two lumps and cream, she settled herself in the seat facing him, rested her arm on the window sill and smiled, half whimsically, into his eyes. The spoonful of egg stopped still, poised dangerously in mid-air:

“You’ve been very kind to do all this,” he stumbled, “and I appreciate it, really I do, and I—I——”

The girl gave a gasp and pointed:

“Be careful!” she warned. “You are spilling the egg all before your napkin. Really, my friend, if you cannot do better than that I shall have to feed you.”

“But I do appreciate it,” Alan continued lamely, “and, please, won’t you tell me who you are? For you are doing all this for me and I don’t even know your name.”

“How dreadful!” the girl laughed. “You see, I have the advantage, for we found out



## *DAUGHTER OF THE DE LA GUERRAS*

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about you from the letters in your pocket. Still, we must be introduced, must we not?"

Rising, she courtesied:

"Allow me, Dr. Lethbridge," she said, smiling down at him, "to present you to Paloma de la Guerra of Corona del Mar."

"And where, may I ask, is Corona del Mar?"

"What, you do not know?" She raised her eyebrows in mock surprise. "But there! I give you pardon, señor, for it is not where travelers go. Know, then, that Corona del Mar is an island that lies out in the Pacific about forty miles southwest of San Diego."

"Is it a part of Mexico?" Alan asked.

"Yes. It is attached to the state of Baja California, although no official lives on the island and our only connection with the government is to send in our yearly taxes."

"But you do not seem like a Mexican girl!"

Alan looked at her closely.

Paloma laughed at his frank scrutiny.

"I suppose you mean that for a compliment, not so? For they are dreadfully fat, are they not, and they have such big feet. Oh, no! I am not Mexican. For, although the de la Guer-

## *THE WAKE OF THE SETTING SUN*

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ras came to Corona del Mar long, long ago, it has always been the strict rule in our family that the children should marry in Spain.”

“But how did your people ever come to settle on an island out in the Pacific?”

“Well, in the days of the Spanish Conquests, the ancestor of our family, Comandador de la Guerra, was one of the first white men to rest his eyes on this portion of America. He was from Granada, where our family still holds sheep lands under the crown; and, as he was a younger son, he took service with the King and was one of the officers who led the expedition that carried the Spanish flag up this western coast of Mexico. He was ten years in the army, and then he received permission to retire and settle down in the new country. And when the King offered him a grant of land, he asked for this island off the coast of Baja California.”

“But what did he want of such a place?”

“I fear the fishing was good, and then he saw that it was well suited for sheep raising, in which, as a boy, he had been trained.”

“Were there sheep already on the island?”

“Oh, no! He brought out from Spain not

## *DAUGHTER OF THE DE LA GUERRAS*

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only the sheep, but some of our own herders and their families.”

“If you have no brothers and sisters isn’t it lonesome for you without young people of your own class?”

“When I was a child I played with the herders’ children. Since I have grown up, my education has naturally separated me from them. Still, I cannot say I have been lonely. My duenna, whom I call my aunt, is a dear old Madrid lady who has cared for me and taught me as if she were my dead mother, and my father and I have always been great friends. Then there is a cousin. Oh no! señor, I have not been lonely and I can hardly wait for my journey to end so that I may ride once again on our trails towards the setting sun.”

“Have you been East long?” Alan inquired.

“Last winter Doña Mencia, my duenna, thought it best for me to see something of the world and, as it was impossible to go abroad, father arranged to have me spend the winter with a relative of the family who married a New York man.”

“You are on your way home now?”

## *THE WAKE OF THE SETTING SUN*

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“Yes. Last Tuesday my cousin received word that her husband, who is a civil engineer, had been seriously hurt down in North Carolina and she left in haste that afternoon. As I was returning next month anyway, and as I did not wish to live in that big dirty city alone, I packed my things, telegraphed father to meet me at San Diego, and, so you see, here I am.”

All through the long evening, the train crawled again through the mountains. In the sultry heat of the stifling car the girl stuck to her promised task, bathing the wounded head, soothing her restless patient with the melody of her soft, rich voice.

Far into the deep blue night they talked, while Alan, usually constrained, let slip the catch of his reserve and told of himself and the purpose of his journey. It was late when she had given him her hand and bade him pleasant dreams. It was long before, tossing from side to side in his section, he had dropped into a sleep in which plunging Pullmans and eyes of liquid gold were mixed in strange confusion.



## CHAPTER IV

### WHEN THE LIMITED PULLED IN

**A**T six the following morning Alan was shaken from his dreams by the porter, who informed him that they would be in San Diego in half an hour. With sore muscles and a bruised head as the sole reminder of the day just passed, he dressed quickly and installed himself in a vacant section, his eyes focused on the stateroom door. As he watched for the turning of the knob, his heart thumped noisily. Evidently he needed his breakfast. What was delaying the girl anyway? Why were women always late? It was only when the train, with a creaking of brakes and a sigh of escaping steam, slowly pulled into the station that she finally stood framed in the doorway, the blush of sleep upon her cheeks.

“Good day, Señor Doctor.” She held out her hand with a smile. “How is the hurt head this morning?”



## *THE WAKE OF THE SETTING SUN*

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“Yes, thank you!” Alan stammered; then colored crimson and pressed her hand with a grip that made her wince. Quizzically she tilted her head sidewise at him, a shadow of surprise veiling her eyes. Then, with an almost imperceptible raising of the corners of her lips and a slight sniff of her delicately chiseled nose, she passed along the narrow corridor. At the door she turned:

“My father will be waiting,” she flung back. “And I beg to you that you come and meet him and permit him to give you thanks for what you have done for his daughter.”

As they stepped from the car into the cold, stimulating air of a foggy morning, Paloma eagerly scanned the platform, deserted but for a few employees, some sleepy hotel runners and the passengers from their train dribbling across the tracks into the station.

“Come!” the girl exclaimed, glancing up and down. “Where is father?”

Gradually the crowd melted away, Alan relieved the porter of his companion’s bag, and a switch engine bumped into the train to back it into the yards.

“It is strange!” she declared, as they stood alone on the deserted platform. “I cannot understand at all. If you only knew my father. Nothing would stop his being here or sending Bart, our foreman, or some of the men.”

“Perhaps he didn’t get your wire,” Alan suggested.

“He must have received it. The *Acapulco* always leaves San Diego Saturdays and Saturday was day before yesterday. And from New York last Wednesday, I sent two telegrams: one to father to be forwarded by mail; the other to our friend, Captain Tanner of the *Acapulco*.”

“We might go to the telegraph office,” Alan started across the tracks. “We can find out there whether the messages came through and if they were delivered.”

From behind the desk, his hand on his clicking instrument, the coatless operator nodded a friendly greeting to Paloma.

“Why, sure, Miss de la Guerra,” he explained. “Your telegrams came through all right and I mailed one to your pa and gave the other myself to Captain Tanner.”

## THE WAKE OF THE SETTING SUN

“Do you know if the *Acapulco* sailed Saturday?” she inquired.

“Yes, for it was my day off and I was fishing out by Point Loma when she went by.”

“Perhaps your father’s launch broke down or something,” Alan suggested. “Anyway,” he added, “I think we had better go along to the restaurant, get some breakfast and then walk down to the dock. Perhaps by that time your boat will be in.”

“You do not understand,” the girl said, as they proceeded along the station arcade. “Corona del Mar lies almost forty miles out to sea and our launch takes at least four hours to make the trip. Father would not wait until this morning to have started. He or Bart would have come over yesterday. Really, my friend, I am afraid that something has happened.”

“Don’t worry!” Alan reassured her. “I tell you what I’ll do. You wait here a minute while I telephone the Eastman people to have the power-boat they are renting Lawton and me at the dock at once. They were expecting me to arrive last night and we were planning to start this morning anyhow. And if, by the time we

have finished our breakfast and reached the dock, there is no sign of your launch, I will run you out myself, and——”

“Oh no, Señor Lethbridge,” she interrupted earnestly, “I could not let you do that. Think of your friend who is waiting for you at the hotel.”

“Hang Lawton!” Alan burst out. “I’ll telephone him to fuss a few of his lady friends over at Coronado until I get back to-night.”

“Oh! Dr. Lethbridge, it is impossible——”

But Alan had dived into a booth and was frantically agitating the lever and slipping nickels in the slot. When, a few minutes later, he emerged, his face was puckered into a broad grin

“Bill is furious,” he chuckled. “I forgot it was only half-past six and I woke the lamb-pie out of a sound sleep.”

As they walked along the platform to the dining room, Paloma put her hand gently on her companion’s arm, and, from under her hat, looked up into his face.

“My friend,” she questioned, “tell me, please, why are you so good to me?”



## *THE WAKE OF THE SETTING SUN*

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At the touch of her glove, Alan quivered like a sensitive horse.

“Why, I guess—why, I am not good—I—come let’s have breakfast.” And, seizing her by the arm, he shoved her roughly through the swinging screen door into the restaurant.

“There now!” he said gruffly, seating himself opposite her. “What do you want?”

As the waitress, with a cynical bride and groom appraisal, called the young couple’s order through the window, Paloma, her black pupils half-serious, half-mocking, looked fixedly at the tall man before her.

“Señor Lethbridge,” she declared emphatically, a flood of blood tingeing the transparent ivory of her skin, “you are very rude. But somehow, you know, I think I like you just the same.”

Breakfast finished, Alan assisted his companion with her coat and, picking up the suitcases, bumped through the swinging doors and followed her out to the platform. Over the station yard, the fog was settling gently and the big-bellied switch engine was belching gulps of white steam into the leaking air. A few yards



along, outside the telegraph office, two figures were standing, peering anxiously up and down the tracks. They were large, square-built men and the whites of their eyes stood out against their mud-colored skins. The leader had a long gash that extended from the corner of his mouth to his ear, giving to his face a leering grin. As Alan and Paloma appeared in the doorway, he gave a start, muttered something to his companion, and came quickly forward. The girl hesitated a moment; then advanced to meet him. Bowing low, twirling his huge sombrero in his great pudgy hands, the man addressed her respectfully in Spanish. Talking excitedly, he kept turning to his fellow, who had joined him, and the pair nodded vigorously to accompany the speaker's remarks.

Presently, Paloma turned back to where Alan was standing, an interested observer of this animated conversation.

"He is one of our men," she explained, smiling at the expression on the doctor's face as he eyed the long horse pistol but imperfectly concealed beneath the greasy leather coat of the newcomer. "Father was detained on the island

on account of important business and he has sent these gentlemen to bring me over. They were here yesterday, but they told them that our train wouldn't be in till seven."

"Good Lord! You aren't going to trust yourself to that pair of cutthroats," Alan expostulated in an undertone, taking in the murderous-looking knife peering nonchalantly from the belt of the second Mexican.

"They have the souls of lambs," the girl laughed. "You must know that my people are much more primitive than your Easterners and they do not follow the fashions of Broadway."

"Just the same, I wish you'd let me take you out in my boat," Alan persisted. "The *Albatross* is all ready at the dock and Bill has probably dropped off to sleep again by this time and won't care if I show up or not."

"But you are quite absurd," the girl replied. "You don't for a minute suppose that my father would send to meet me men whom he did not trust."

"Do you know them?" the doctor questioned, still unconvinced.

"They are not the men who used to run the

## *WHEN THE LIMITED PULLED IN*

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launch," Paloma admitted. "But father wrote me that Pedro had died and that his son was working at the ranch house; and these are certainly the men whom he has engaged to take their places."

"But look at that fellow's face," Alan insisted.

"I'll admit it is not my ideal." The girl burst into a merry laugh. "But then, what will you? Apollo would probably have made a miserable engineer. However, since you take so much stock in good looks you must surely come to Corona del Mar. For our Granadians are really a fine-looking set of men. Only, as they know of nothing but sheep, we have to import our mechanics from the mainland."

And, before the doctor could protest further, she had turned again to the two subjects of the discussion who, innocent of the controversy their appearance was causing, were stolidly following the difficulties of the portly switch engine. In response to some directions given in Spanish, the man with the scar took the trunk check she held out and disappeared in the direction of the baggage-room; while his companion

## *THE WAKE OF THE SETTING SUN*

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unceremoniously seized the suitcase from the reluctant grip of the protesting doctor.

“Don’t worry, please!” Paloma placed her hand soothingly on Lethbridge’s arm and pulled him gently along the platform. “For while I cannot accept your offer this morning, I will surely go in your boat when you visit us. You must promise to do that, my friend. For the hunting is splendid and my father will so wish to thank you for what you did for me yesterday. He will think it unpardonable if you do not come.”

“But what will his daughter think?” Alan answered, his thoughts driven topsy-turvy by the soft pressure on his sleeve.

“She thinks that somebody she knows is somewhat of a spoiled bear.” She looked straight ahead. “But, bad as he is, she wants to see him again.”

At that moment, the Mexican with the scar came out of the baggage-room, the huge wardrobe trunk slung on his shoulder as though it had been a pasteboard carton, and, his companion falling in behind him, the party moved away along the tracks.



## *WHEN THE LIMITED PULLED IN*

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At the street, the girl extended her hand.

“You have promised to come.” She winced as he pressed her glove. “Now don’t forget, for I want you.”

And as Alan stood looking disconsolately after her, she waved her hand and blew him an imaginary kiss; then turning, she followed her strange porters in the direction of the water front. For a full minute, the doctor stood gazing after her. Finally, with a dubious shake of his head, he retraced his steps to the baggage-room.



## CHAPTER V

### DOWN THE HARBOR

**T**HE transfer of his trunk arranged, Alan sauntered down the platform. Half-way along, the Western Union sign caught his eye and there came to his mind a doting aunt in the East who had probably seen some account of the wreck, with possibly some mention of his own name. As he entered, the same operator cast him a casual glance over the top of the sporting page of the morning paper; then reluctantly hunched out of his chair and leaned his elbows on the counter.

“Did Señor de la Guerra show up?” he inquired as Alan finally shoved the yellow slip in his direction.

“He sent over a couple of his men,” Alan explained. “We found them waiting outside your office just now when we finished breakfast.”

## *DOWN THE HARBOR*

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The agent's ink-stained fingers stopped their thumbing of the dog's-eared rate-book.

"You don't mean the pair of greasers who were lounging by that mail-box five minutes ago?" he queried.

"Yes. That's where they were standing."

"One of 'em had a nasty scar across his cheek?"

"Yes. What of it?"

"Good Lord!" the agent ejaculated.

"What do you mean?" A ripple of dread swept through Alan's mind.

"Oh, nothing." The man shook his head dubiously. "I suppose it's all right. Only that fellow with the scar is Ruiz, who held up that party out to Alpine seven years ago. He only got out of San Quentin last month."

"Are you sure of what you are saying?" Alan's voice was dry.

"Am I sure?" The man gave a mirthless chuckle. "I was court stenographer in those days and you can't sit opposite to that face and forget it."

Throwing a dollar on the counter, Alan grabbed his suitcase and ran out of the station.

## THE WAKE OF THE SETTING SUN

A hundred yards down the street he slowed down to a jog trot, then to a brisk walk. After all, he was unnecessarily alarming himself. Suppose it was Ruiz. Once a criminal always a criminal was a good police theory but—still it was curious after all that the girl's father should have sent to meet her two men she had never seen before. But had he sent them? Perhaps— Lethbridge broke into a dead run. Dodging trucks and wagons, he kept to the middle of the street, much to the amazement of the passers-by who turned and stared in astonishment at the fleeing man, his suitcase bumping against his legs, his overcoat floating out behind.

As he burst out on the water front, he brought up short, glancing right and left in the vain hope that the girl and her companions might be in sight. Then he darted for the dock where his memory told him his launch was awaiting him.

The air was reeking with the smell of fish and tar. Into the oily waters of the bay the pier stretched like a shrouded ghostlike arm. Near the end, ten feet below the planking, the *Albatross* was rocking gently at her moorings. A power-boat, broad of beam and solid of timber,

## *DOWN THE HARBOR*

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she had become a favorite with fishermen, both because of her own stanch qualities and because of her jovial skipper, a red-shocked mariner named O'Neil, who had lost his right eye in some Central American revolution.

Pitching his suitcase into the cockpit in the stern, sailing his coat in its wake, Alan gave a spring that landed him in a heap on the deck-house and brought the carrot top piece of O'Neil bristling out of the forward hatch.

"Say, what the h—l?" he bellowed indignantly. Then as Alan scrambled to his feet the flush of anger faded to a look of blank amazement.

"For the love of Mike, Doctor, what's up?" he queried as Alan hitched down beside him.

"I'll explain later," the latter gasped. "Only I want you to get this boat down to the mouth of the harbor as quickly as you can."

"But Mr. Lawton," O'Neil expostulated.

"Don't mind Lawton. I want to intercept a boat that's coming out and there's no time to lose. For the Lord's sake, hurry."

Impressed by the earnest tone of the man whom he had grown to like on a previous trip,



## THE WAKE OF THE SETTING SUN

the captain let fly a large quid over the rail and stuck his head down the hatch.

“Hey, Jim!” he bellowed. “Come on up here and get your engine going. The doctor’s come and he wants to start right off. Hurry up, man, it’s important.”

In a moment, the narrow, thin, beaklike face of the engineer emerged from the hatch and his long rolled-out body slid like an eel to the deck.

“What’s the big idea?” he grumbled out of the corner of his mouth, looking dumfoundedly from his commander to Alan, who was frantically trying to snap the stern hawser off the post.

“Get her going and don’t ask questions,” the captain called out as he sprang along the deck to loose the bow mooring.

“Hurry, Jim,” Alan urged, seizing a boat-hook and slowly pushing the *Albatross* from the dock. “I want to get to the mouth of the harbor to intercept a boat that’s coming out.”

As the six feet four of the dazed Jim slid over the edge into the engine-pit, the pier began to move gently by and the *Albatross*, propelled



## DOWN THE HARBOR

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by the boathooks, quietly slipped into the stream.

The dense fog wrapped the harbor like a shroud, dripping from the little mast in pattering drops upon the deck. From amidships, a steady stream of oaths flowed above the engine, into whose chilled primers Jim was squirting gasoline from a long-spouted oil-can. Suddenly there was a muffled explosion, a series of sharp reports and the *Albatross* lurched forward. Gradually she gained momentum and the tide hummed and bubbled against her sides. To starboard, the gray phantom of a battleship loomed suddenly and through the soaking air came eight strokes of a ship's bell. Presently Alan worked his way forward and stood beside the captain, straining to pierce the milky barrier of the mist. Vaguely the bold headland of Point Loma rose ahead and a dull lowing as of some monstrous cow came floating to their ears and died away.

“Stop her!” Alan called back to Jim. “We’re off the entrance now and had better lie to and listen. If we hear a launch coming out, we must try to pick her up and stop her.”

## THE WAKE OF THE SETTING SUN

“Say, Doctor, what are you letting us in for?” O’Neil snorted as the engine stopped and the *Albatross* glided softly through the sticky water. “You ain’t going to hold up some craft, are you?”

“It’s got to be done,” Alan answered grimly.

“I’m a respectable married man,” the captain chuckled, “and I give up this pirate stuff years ago. Still, if you tell us what’s blowing, we’ll probably ship along with you, won’t we, Jim?”

“Sure,” the elongated engineer drawled, lighting a brown-stained cigarette stump that hung half out of the corner of his ample mouth. “Shoot, Doctor, and tell us what’s the dope.”

While the *Albatross* rocked gently in the slight ground swell, Alan related his meeting with Paloma and the incidents leading up to the disquieting disclosures of the telegraph operator. When he had finished, the captain sat for a time in silence. Then, he shifted a fresh quid from cheek to cheek and let fly an ample streak of umber over the water.

“You want to know what I think?” his remaining optic twinkled with a half-amused glint.

## *DOWN THE HARBOR*

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“Well, I think, young feller, that you have got all het up over nothing. I remember that Ruiz business all right. He stuck up a party out to Alpine and they only got him after a hot chase up around Cuyamaca. But what of it? Now he’s out and got a berth on the island without the señor knowing anything about him. And it’s pickles to snails he’ll work honest and regular till some other greaser sticks a knife in him. And that’s about all that can be said for any of that gang they got working down at their Southern Ranch.”

“I don’t follow you, Cap,” Jim shook his head. “That feller Ruiz was a bad one, even if he only got seven years for that Alpine job. If he had the chance, he’d shake down the old man for some dough all right, all right. But what gets me, Doctor, is why you think they are going to carry her off by water. He’d have to get her over into Mexico to be safe to demand a ransom. What’s the matter with the land way?”

“The border’s heavily guarded,” Alan pointed out. “It would be some job getting by our soldiers and the wire fence.”

## THE WAKE OF THE SETTING SUN

“That’s true enough,” the captain put in. “Only you’re just imagining a lot of things that ain’t so. Dames ain’t being carried off these days, and I’d like to know what you’re going to say if you do stop that boat and find the young lady sitting up bright and cheerful in the stern. Feel pretty foolish, won’t you?”

“Not much,” Alan answered doggedly. “She’ll have to get off and let us take her over on the *Albatross*.”

“You got some job ahead of you,” the captain chuckled. “Clear you ain’t had much to do with females, least of all with them that has some real Spanish in ’em.”

“Listen!” Jim interrupted suddenly. “Hear it? There’s a boat coming down the harbor.”

Over the oily waters of the bay, steaming like a vat, crept a faint rhythmical puffing.

“You’re right, it’s a launch sure enough,” the captain admitted. “It’s heading further over towards the point.”

“Shall I crank her?” Jim queried.

“No,” O’Neil objected. “For the minute that bird of yours gets humming we can’t hear



## DOWN THE HARBOR

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nothing. Anyhow, we are drifting that way ourselves.”

The puffing of the distant engine grew steadily nearer.

“She’s just off there,” O’Neil muttered. “I’ll bet she isn’t a hundred yards. Looks as though she would go by us without our seeing her.”

“There she is,” Jim burst out excitedly.

“Watch out! Here she comes!” O’Neil jumped for the wheel.

All at once a long, low fishing boat loomed out of the fog and bore down swiftly on them. At O’Neil’s shout, the man at the wheel jammed his helm to port and the onrushing boat, veering sharply, scraped the stern of the *Albatross*. As the craft slipped by, out to the ocean, Alan had rushed to the stern with a cry. For, in the helmsman, he had recognized the man with the scar. While in the cockpit aft, a gag of dirty cloth stuffed in her mouth, lay the figure of a woman.



## CHAPTER VI

### THE CHASE TOWARDS THE SUN

“FOLLOW her!” Alan strained forward after the low-lying craft, dissolving like a stereopticon picture on the white sheet of the fog.

“Why don’t you get her going!” O’Neil bel-  
lowed, gripping the handles of the wheel and  
glancing back impatiently at Jim, who was fran-  
tically cranking the heavy motor.

“What’s wrong?” Alan’s voice was hoarse  
as he watched the engineer spinning the pon-  
derous flywheel.

“Carburetor,” the man gulped, the sweat  
streaking down his dirt-begrimed face.

From across the water came the steady chug,  
chug of the vanishing fishing boat.

“H—l!” O’Neil growled. “They’re going  
to get away on us.”

“Keep your shirt on,” Jim panted, dropping  
the starting handle. “There’s something wrong

## THE CHASE TOWARDS THE SUN

with the wiring or plugs and I just got to take my time.”

The puffing of the boat ahead was growing steadily fainter. O’Neil kept turning the wheel to right and left, swearing softly under his breath. Alan paced up and down the cockpit, puffing vigorously on his pipe, his eyes following Jim’s greasy fingers working madly at the sleeping engine.

Finally the engineer emitted a grunt of angry satisfaction. “There, d—n it,” he reached for a pair of pliers and quickly twisted together two broken ends of wire. “Give her some juice while I spin her.”

There was a loud explosion, a cloud of sooty smoke belched from the stern and the engine raced noisily. Quickly the *Albatross* gathered way and began to cut through the milky barrier ahead.

“They have a good fifteen minutes’ start on us,” Alan slipped down beside the captain. “Do you think we can catch them?”

“We’ve got to see ’em in order to catch ’em,” O’Neil muttered. “If this d—n fog don’t lift, we ain’t got a chance.”

## *THE WAKE OF THE SETTING SUN*

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They were out of the harbor now, plowing through the leaden waters of the open ocean. Off on the port beam the metallic call of a bugle crept faintly to their ears.

“Hey! Jim! Shut off that motor!” the captain shouted presently. “We’ll have to follow them by the sound until things clear up.”

The engine stopped and the *Albatross* slipped silently over the glassy expanse. From ahead, to starboard, came a deadened rhythmical chugging.

“Let her go, Jim!” O’Neil squinted his surviving optic in the direction of the compass. “Give her all she’ll stand. They’re heading down the coast.”

They were well out on the Pacific now, steering S.S.W., and the solemn solitudes of the great ocean enveloped them. The air was chill and still but for the even beat of the motor and the half-surging murmur of the living, restless waters. Up there in the sky a disk of glarish light showed silver-white against the opaque gray, like a moon on a plaque of wireless *cloisonné*.

Again, the captain ordered the engine

## THE CHASE TOWARDS THE SUN

stopped. Again, from off the starboard bow, floated the dull cadenced chug, chug of the fleeing boat.

“They’re still heading down the coast,” O’Neil commented. “Probably they are making for one of them coves where they can land and take to the mountains. I am going to point a bit in and see if we can’t intercept ’em.”

“Aren’t there any towns or settlements?” Alan inquired.

“Nothing worth mentioning. No, if they can make a landing and get into them mountains, that girl’s father had just as well fish up the bait. There ain’t no Scotland Yard in Lower California and it would take an army to corner anybody with all them greasers agin you.”

The minutes dragged along. It was over an hour since the *Albatross* had left the harbor. From time to time, the captain stopped the engine and still, through the thick, whitewashed wall, came the same dull chugging.

“We’re not gaining on ’em,” O’Neil grumbled finally. “They got a better boat than I thought they had, for Jim is giving our old girl all she’ll stand. What I can’t figure is the



## *THE WAKE OF THE SETTING SUN*

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course them fellers are sailing. Probably it's because they're a bit twisted in their bearings. But they are making for Corona instead of down the coast."

"They certainly wouldn't do that intentionally," Alan declared. "For if they landed on the island, the de la Guerra people would rescue her."

"Not necessarily," the captain rubbed his vein-streaked nose. "Of course, if they tried to put in at the northern end where the family and their herders live, they would get torn to bits. But since the sheep business grew so big, the old man has had to import a lot of peons from the mainland. These fellers bunk down at the southern end of the island at a ranch they call the Rancho del Sur. They are a tough crew all right and there has been some nasty ructions between them and the Granadians. Naturally, the old señor has sided with his own men and he's sent his nephew to live down at the Rancho del Sur to keep 'em in order. If Ruiz had got work down there and Romero, the nephew, handled him a bit stiff, the chap's Mexican enough to get even. And he'd find a lot of help from



## *THE CHASE TOWARDS THE SUN*

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that southern gang. And what makes me almost sure them fellers are from the island is they knew the girl was coming. If they had been just ordinary bandits from the mainland, they'd have never knowed."

Another hour and another slipped by. Numbed, they conversed in monosyllables, their voices sounding hollow and muffled. Up in the sky, the half-drowned disk was growing clearer and more sharply outlined through the obscuring veil. Gradually the cold silver changed to warm yellow and then to melted gold. Then, of a sudden, the tenuous gossamer of film floated away over the waters and around them the Pacific stretched like a plain of sapphire dust under the unbroken, cloudless sky. A soft, warm breeze had sprung up, streaking the mirror surface with ruffled ribbons of watered silk. Way out on the horizon a long, green mass of land rose majestically from the sea and silhouetted its towering, mountainous outline against the molten sun. Further in, nearer the mainland, lay a smaller rocky islet. Together they seemed like some huge marine monster and

## *THE WAKE OF THE SETTING SUN*

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her cub feeding on the beds of kelp swaying in the purple waters round their heads.

“Look!” Alan sprang to his feet, pointing.

A mile and a half ahead, a low, unpainted fishing boat was streaking along. From her bow, V-shaped ripples, hemmed with dazzling white, scooted away across the smooth, even plain.

“They’ve made us out,” O’Neil grunted as a figure rose in the stern and, climbing forward beside the man at the wheel, motioned excitedly. Aft, a woman stood up and waved.

“They’ve unbound her,” Alan exclaimed.

“They just had her hitched up in the harbor so she couldn’t raise an alarm,” O’Neil replied.

“They’re not making for Corona,” Jim called forward. “See, they’re cutting alongside of Sarten Island.”

“How about firing off your revolver?” Alan suggested. “It might attract the attention of some of the señor’s men.”

“There ain’t nobody on the little island,” O’Neil explained. “Corona’s the big one out to sea. The one ahead is called Sarten, which means frying pan in Spanish, both because of

## *THE CHASE TOWARDS THE SUN*

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the shape and because it's so bare and baked that the natives claim the devil cooks in it."

"It certainly looks as if they were heading for Sarten," Jim called out presently. "I'll bet you they are making for that little cove down on the mainland side where the handle joins on to the pan."

"But they can't be," O'Neil objected. "They would never land on that dump. There ain't a place to hide and we would be right on 'em."

"Yet that's what they're doing," Jim persisted. "Otherwise why ain't they heading more towards the mainland? If they was going down the coast, they would be steering several points further east."

The craft ahead was approaching the point of the long, narrow handle of rock that reached out a half mile into the ocean from the sweeping pan-shaped mass of the island. Bare of tree or grass, unspotted by bush or shrub, its pink granite glowed like the molten copper of a gigantic skillet simmering under the beating rays of the broiling sun.

The tide was at ebb, and swirled and swished around the rocky point, streaking the peacock

## *THE WAKE OF THE SETTING SUN*

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green with patches of marbled foam. Caught in the swift flow, the craft ahead swung wide and sidled forward like a fox terrier. A moment later and she had slipped into the quiet waters of the channel and swept from sight behind the long, low granite wall.

“They’re making for that cove all right,” Jim called forward.

“Looks that way,” O’Neil admitted. “But why? That’s what’s gettin’ me.”

“Perhaps, if it’s a feud, some more of the crowd from the Rancho del Sur are waiting for them,” Alan suggested.

“That’s possible,” O’Neil growled. “And, if so, we’re in for rough weather. Have you got that revolver of yours with you, Doctor?”

“Sorry,” Alan shook his head. “You and Bill kidded me so much last trip for coming West armed that I left it at home.”

“Too bad!” O’Neil said regretfully. “You surely could make that gun talk.”

“You can have mine,” Jim passed forward a long-barreled revolver. “After I seed you bring down them gulls, I knowed I wasn’t in your class.”



## *THE CHASE TOWARDS THE SUN*

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They had doubled the point now and had swung into the still, sheltered waters under the lee of the island. Down to the south, the narrow handle stretched its flat-top cliffs above the restless Pacific. On the ocean front, these plunged sheer into the stirring surf. On the side facing the mainland, they rested on a fringe of satiny sands that extended for half a mile to where the island bellied out in a great circle. At this point of intersection, hollowed like an armpit, the sea had eaten its way into a tiny sheltered cove. In the center of the little crescent beach, her nose stuck deep into the sand, was a dirty, gray fishing boat.

“They’ve quit her!” Jim exclaimed excitedly.

“The h—l they have,” O’Neil growled. “They’re in that deckhouse. Come on, get down in the cockpit or they’ll pot you.”

Swiftly the boat skirted the long granite arm to the opening of the tiny bay. On some rocks to the left a group of seals slipped quietly into the still water.

“Shut her off!” the captain ordered as, crouched beside the wheel, he deftly steered the oncoming launch straight for the boat ahead.



## THE WAKE OF THE SETTING SUN

There was a scraping, crunching sound, a sharp jolt and the stern of the *Albatross*, swinging wide, crashed into the rail of the beached craft.

“Now watch out!” O’Neil muttered, gradually raising his grizzled eye until it swept the deck. “You keep squinting at the hatch, Doctor. I’m going to crawl along and take a peek through that porthole.”

Gripping his revolver firmly, slipping over into the dirty fishing boat, O’Neil threw himself flat on his stomach and slowly squirmed along the deck. Opposite the cabin, he raised himself on his hands and peered through the circlet of grease-streaked glass. Then, lurching to his feet, he beckoned to his companions.

“Come on over,” he called. “They’ve beat it.”

“Better be careful!” Alan glanced anxiously at the low cliff behind the beach.

“They ain’t up there,” Jim had climbed the little mast and, holding to the cross-piece, swept the long arm of the island that extended like a causeway to the north.

“What I want to know is why they ever put in here.” O’Neil stroked his red, bristling chin.

## *THE CHASE TOWARDS THE SUN*

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“I got it,” Jim, who was fumbling with the engine, broke out triumphantly. “They’re out of gas. Look at this stick. When I shove it in the tank there’s only a half inch of it wet. The trouble was their reserve can sprang a leak. See! It’s sopped up that waste and run all over the flooring.”

O’Neil turned the greasy rule over in his hands, then glanced down at the pile of soaking rubbish beside the motor.

“That’s the answer,” he nodded thoughtfully. “It sure does look as if we had ’em good and proper.”

“Yes, but how will we get at ’em?” Jim muttered. “That cock-eyed greaser has a gun and, if they beat it for that hill up there, how will we root ’em out? I think we had better sneak over to Corona and round up a posse.”

“Yes, and give ’em a chance to hail one of them fishing boats out there,” O’Neil objected. “No, sir! There are three of us to two of them and we got two guns to their one. If we ain’t equal to ’em, and they greasers, we ought to be shot.”

“All right,” Jim assented. “Here, Cap, give

## THE WAKE OF THE SETTING SUN

me a hand with tying up these boats and we'll start after 'em."

"Not you!" O'Neil declared. "The doctor's going to keep your gun and you're to camp on board. For if them birds should give us the slip, they could get back here before we could and we would be nicely marooned with them on their merry way to Mexico. Also, we'd better anchor the old girl out in the cove there. For you'd stand a fat chance if them fellers came on you sudden like. And we'll shove their boat out too and let her drift."

"What time is it?" Alan asked.

"Two!" O'Neil threw his solitary eye on his huge repeater. "We got four hours of daylight. Let's take a bite and get down to business."

After a hasty meal of bananas and doughnuts, the captain and Alan leaped down to the sands and, putting their shoulders to the beached craft, watched it slip out into the cove. Presently Jim splashed overboard the heavy anchor and the *Albatross* lay swinging at her moorings twenty yards from shore.

Crossing the white stretch, the two men crunched over the stranded fringe of crackling

## *THE CHASE TOWARDS THE SUN*

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kelp and pulled themselves up the low cliff to the level rock above.

At their backs the handle of the island stretched like a narrow breakwater into the Pacific. Before them the coast swelled out into a great circle, the pink granite sides rising sheer from the curling surf. From the top of these cliffs, the land sloped gently up to a cone, cut off at the top and hollowed inwards like a saucer. Around the lower reaches, blocks and boulders made the surface jagged and uneven. Halfway up, these gave way to smooth shale slopes like the bare truncated crater of an extinct volcano.

Streaks of fleecy clouds were floating overhead. Out on the blue floor of the channel, fishing boats were slowly moving, their triangular sails glowing red in the sun.

“They’re either up in that saucer at the top or hidden among a pile of rocks around on that south side,” O’Neil said. “Let’s work ’round first. Only keep under cover and go easy.”

As they started to pick their way from boulder to boulder, a faint cry from over the water



## *THE WAKE OF THE SETTING SUN*

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brought them up short. Looking back, they saw Jim waving violently and pointing.

“They’re up in that saucer,” O’Neil concluded. “Jim can make ’em out because he is a lot further away than we are and can see over the rim while we can’t.”

“It is going to be hard to get at them.” Alan looked dubiously at the long stretch of smooth, fine rock circling the summit like a collar.

“We can’t cross that open space,” his companion admitted. “That feller with the gun would pick us off before we were halfway up.”

“What will we do?” Alan asked anxiously.

“Wait till night,” the captain concluded. “It’s clouding up a bit now. And, if we go at it from the mainland side, we will be out of the shadow of what moon there is and can make our way up without their seeing us. Come! Let’s get back to the boat.”



## CHAPTER VII

### OUT OF THE FRYING PAN

ALL about them evening was softly settling. Out on the curving rim of the world banks of clouds, fringed with red, billowed up like a great forest fire. Overhead the mackereled sky caught the pink glow, then turned to leaden gray. Just above their heads, the truncated cone of Sarten loomed rugged and forbidding. All at once night let fall her thick veil and darkness brooded over the stirring, restless ocean.

“Good luck!” Jim called after them as O’Neil and Alan leaped on the white sands and the *Albatross* once more backed out into the little bay.

Pulling themselves up the low cliff, the two men bore to the left where the island swept away in its great arc towards the mainland.

“Thank goodness, them clouds cover the moon!” O’Neil muttered. “It’s black as pitch

## *THE WAKE OF THE SETTING SUN*

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and, if we're quiet, we ought to be on 'em before they know it."

"Provided they're still up there," Alan said dubiously.

"Oh, they're there all right," the captain declared. "I saw one of 'em stick his bean over the rim half an hour back. And, anyhow, it's the best place they could find. I was fishing over here last year and, as I recollect, the top of that mountain slopes in like a bowl and right in the middle is a bunch of boulders piled up in a sort of cairn. And, if they take to cover, we're going to have some job getting at 'em, for even on a night like this is, there's some light so high up."

Cautiously Alan and his companion picked their path between the scattered rocks until the smooth shale slopes rose sharply above their heads.

"Now get on your belly and be careful," O'Neil whispered. "'They can't see us ten feet off, but we don't want to start this shale a-rolling."

Crawling ten yards, then pausing and listening, the two men wormed their way up the steep

## *OUT OF THE FRYING PAN*

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incline. Just below the summit, they stopped still and held their breath as, on the rim above, a low voice muttered something in Spanish. Further along a second voice mumbled a reply. A minute, two minutes, they lay motionless. Again the voice above came to their ears, this time further along. Giving Alan's sleeve a twitch, O'Neil again squirmed cautiously upwards, over the edge of the rim.

To the right, a murky figure was just visible against the faint moon glow seeping through the wadded clouds. As O'Neil cautiously rose to his feet, his shoe loosened a small rock which started jumping down the smooth slope with a train of pebbles scurrying in its wake. At the sound, the Mexican on the rim had turned toward them. Then, with a grunt of alarm, he plunged backwards into the bowl and dashed for the pile of boulders in the center.

"There goes the other one!" The captain's revolver barked sharply in the still night air as a black form streaked down the opposite slope.

"Missed him!" O'Neil growled. "Now watch——"

## *THE WAKE OF THE SETTING SUN*

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The rocks of the cairn stood out in a flash of flame and the gravel beneath their feet splattered in a shower.

“Get back!” Alan dragged his companion down below the rim.

“H—l! Now we’re in for it!” O’Neil muttered. “Them greasers have the eyes of cats and we haven’t a show to cross that space.”

“How about the other side?” Alan asked.

“It’s clear open ground all around that cairn,” O’Neil explained, “and while they can’t actually see us, there’s light enough for ’em to make out the mass of our bodies crawling towards ’em. No! There ain’t no use trying to rush ’em, ’cause they’d plug us before we had gone ten feet. The worst of it is we can’t fire for fear of hitting Miss Paloma.”

“But what shall we do?” Alan’s voice was husky.

“Search me!” O’Neil growled. “Looks as if we were in a deadlock. For it’s sure that they can’t get across that open space any more than we can.”

For a stretch they lay in silence, their eyes glued on the shadowy boulders in the center



## OUT OF THE FRYING PAN

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of the bowl below them. From time to time the rumbling voices of the Mexicans came to their ears. Once the tones were raised as though in dispute, then died away in a low undertone.

“Do you think you could hold ’em off alone?” O’Neil asked presently.

“Certainly,” Alan declared. “My eyes are getting used to the light and I could see anything moving on these slopes.”

“Take my gun, then,” O’Neil passed along his heavy Colt. “I’m going back to the boat.”

“What’s your plan?” Alan queried.

“I don’t know if it will work, but it’s a chance. I’ll be back as soon as I can.”

And before Alan could question him further, the captain’s bulky form was clattering over the shale and was swallowed up in the night.

Alan lay watching. All around him blackness hung oppressive over the mysterious expanse of the great ocean. Out to sea, under the vague, majestic outline of Corona del Mar, dim lights flickered like a swarm of fireflies on an oppressive summer’s night. Behind him, at his feet, a red lantern bobbed and swayed as the *Albatross* rocked at her moorings. Faintly, a half-

## *THE WAKE OF THE SETTING SUN*

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heard call floated up to his straining ears. Then the lantern moved towards him and hung still. A quarter of an hour passed and the red light again bobbed in the cove below. Well out from the cairn, a long low rock seemed to move. Desperately, Alan strove to pierce the inky gloom. Was it a rock or—? He fired, the shale spurted and a shadowy form rose to its feet and darted back to safety. An answering shot lit up the cairn and again he heard the rumor of mumbling angry voices.

From below came the sound of pebbles chasing one another, the panting of a climbing man and, with a muttered string of oaths, O'Neil pitched down flat beside him.

“What have you got there?” Alan could faintly make out the bulky masses the gasping mariner was towing in his wake.

“Sacks, d—n them,” O'Neil choked.

“What are you going to do with them?” Alan asked, wonderingly.

For a stretch, O'Neil lay softly cursing to himself.

“They're full of waste for Jim's engine,” he said finally, “and these balls of cord are fas-

## *OUT OF THE FRYING PAN*

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tened to 'em. My scheme is to leave 'em lying here and to make our way 'round the cone, playing out the cord as we go. If we keep down below the edge and are quiet, them birds will never suspicion we have slipped our anchor and are boarding 'em from the stern. But, first of all, let me have my gun and I'll give a salute so they'll think we are still here."

As the shot rang out the two men ducked and carefully began to make their way around the rim.

"Hold that cord taut," O'Neil cautioned presently. "They can't see it an inch before their snouts, but, if it was slack, it might sag on to them rocks."

After a time Alan paused and waited for his companion to come up beside him.

"I think this is far enough," he said

"Thank God the cord will reach," the captain muttered. "Now begin pulling easy on your end and, as you pull, work your way down towards 'em."

The air was still. Overhead the buried moon smudged with a sickly patch the layers of clouds. From the edge of the rim opposite two

## *THE WAKE OF THE SETTING SUN*

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figures began to crawl down the side of the bowl. Faintly, in the dim light, Alan and his companion could make them out wiggling and hunching over the loose shale.

“Come on!” O’Neil whispered as four streaks of flame lighted up the vague outline of a crouching Mexican peering out behind a boulder. Then there was silence, broken by a sharp click and the clatter of falling cartridges.

Again, the two figures on the slope opposite began to crawl steadily nearer. Again, six shots, spaced, crashed out, the bullets thudded dully, and the moving figures lay still. Cautiously the Mexican with the gun raised his head above the boulder and started to rise. All at once he gave a grunt of alarm as two bodies threw themselves on him from behind and he was hurled with a crash to the ground.

For several seconds the three men fought in a writhing heap. Then came a stifled cry of pain and some heavy metal object rattled on the stones beside them.

“I got his gun. You get the other feller!” O’Neil panted.



## *OUT OF THE FRYING-PAN*

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Freeing himself from the squirming mass, Alan rushed up to the rim. But the second Mexican was already out of sight, slipping frantically down the sliding shale.

A dull cry from O'Neil brought him up short. A flitting shadow was darting from the cairn. Halfway up Alan fired. The cartridge jammed and missed. Before he could pull the trigger the fleeing man had plunged over the rim and was swallowed up in the blackness below.

"Are you hurt?" Alan hastened down to where O'Neil was lying, flat on his back, his revolver still grasped in his right hand.

"Wind!" the latter gulped. "He kneed me, d—n him!"

"He didn't get your gun, anyway?" Alan raised his companion's head.

"H—I no! How about his own?" O'Neil struggled to his feet.

For a moment, Alan felt along the big boulder just beyond. "Here it is," he exclaimed triumphantly.

"Thank God, then," O'Neil ejaculated. "For we've pulled his teeth, even if we ought to be shot for bungling this job the way we have."

## *THE WAKE OF THE SETTING SUN*

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“But where is Miss Paloma?” Alan burst out.

“Here!” a shadowy figure was groping around the rocks towards them. “Did they get away?”

“Yes!” O’Neil growled.

“Are you all right?” Alan questioned anxiously.

“Quite all right,” Paloma answered. “They didn’t bind me after they left the harbor. Only they threatened to shoot me if I called out or tried to run. And, while it was probably only a threat, still I didn’t wish to take the chance.”

“They won’t do no more shooting now,” O’Neil muttered. “It’s too dark to get after ’em to-night, but we’ll attend to ’em in the morning.”

“Then let’s get back to the boat,” the girl exclaimed. “I’ve had nothing to eat since breakfast and I am starved. When I have eaten, I shall feel more able to tell you how grateful I am to you for getting me out of the hands of those men.”

“But why did they carry you off?” Alan questioned as they slowly started down the slope.

“I can’t make it out,” Paloma answered.

## *OUT OF THE FRYING PAN*

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“When I left the station for the water front, I began thinking of your joking. And, while I wasn’t exactly frightened, still I was a little worried. For, while I was sure I had seen those men somewhere, it struck me as queer that my father had not sent Bart or Romero or some one I knew. I think I should have turned back then, except I had made so much fun of your warning. And, of course, I did not wish to make a scene when all was perhaps all right. But when I saw the boat, then I grew really frightened, for I knew my father would never have sent over that dirty fishing launch. I guess my face showed my suspicions, for that man with the scar threw down my trunk and grabbed my arm before I could turn to run. I tried to pull away from him and scream, but he clapped his hand over my mouth, picked me up as though I were a feather and carried me on board. Then he stuck that filthy rag in my mouth and bound my arms to my sides. There was no one on that old dock and the fog hid us going down the harbor.”

“But why did they do it?” Alan queried.

## *THE WAKE OF THE SETTING SUN*

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“Who knows?” Paloma replied. “Ransom money? A grudge against my father? What will you of these Mexicans?”

“Do you think it has anything to do with that Rancho del Sur gang?” O’Neil broke in.

“Perhaps. Still, I don’t know. Before they saw you they talked a little, but all I could discover was that they were going to take me down the coast and wait until some one else came.”

“Then you don’t think they were working alone?”

“Some one else planned it. These men were merely obeying orders.”

Leaving the shale, they picked their way among the scattered boulders. Clinging to his arm, Paloma and Alan went on for a time in silence.

“You were very good, my friend, to have come to help me,” she said finally. “Only I do so regret that you have had your fishing spoiled.”

“You have certainly furnished me with enough excitement to take its place,” Alan chuckled.



## *OUT OF THE FRYING PAN*

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“Is it not so?” she laughed. “With wrecks and robbers and rescued girls, what will you tell your Eastern sweethearts?”

“I haven’t any sweethearts,” Alan snorted. “And, anyway, I think all this is just some movie stunt arranged for my benefit and that you are some picture queen and the captain gets letters from lovesick maidens all over America.”

“Wish I did,” O’Neil chortled. “Still, my old missus would probably raise Ned, so I guess it’s just as well my fatal beauty is hid.”

“Honest, isn’t it all a dream?” Alan whispered as, arm in arm, they waited on the beach while O’Neil was bellowing at Jim. “Girls are not kidnaped these days and respectable Eastern doctors don’t shoot at Mexicans out on rocky islands.”

“Perhaps they are enchanted islands,” the girl murmured, “where fairy princes rescue princesses from awful villains and—”

“And in the end get married and live happily ever after,” Alan concluded.

“Here’s the boat,” Paloma dropped his arm,

## *THE WAKE OF THE SETTING SUN*

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as the bobbing red lantern came to rest on the beach below. Halfway down the sands, she turned.

“Don’t you think,” she called back, “that it spoils a fairy story to know the ending?”

## CHAPTER VIII

### CORONA DEL MAR

UP the aisle of the swaying sleeper, a brown man with a scar was crawling stealthily behind her. Struggling to rise to her aid, to throw off the paralysis which bound his limbs, Alan could only gibber forth a gurgling cry of warning.

“Hey! Wake up!” A carroty head was waving before his sleep-filled eyes.

“You got ’em bad, doctor.” Jim’s lean countenance was grinning over O’Neil’s shoulder.

For a second, Alan stared dazedly at the two figures. Then, disentangling his feet from the steamer rug, he hitched out of the long chair.

“Guess it was the doughnuts,” he blinked. “What time is it?”

“Nearly seven,” the engineer chuckled. “You and her were sleeping like babes and we didn’t have the heart to wake you.”

Following the engineer’s glance, Alan looked aft. In a steamer chair, her head thrown back

## *THE WAKE OF THE SETTING SUN*

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and turned on one side, Paloma lay asleep.

“Pretty as a picture, ain’t she?” Jim confided earnestly.

“She’s beautiful,” Alan murmured, half to himself.

“Anyway, she’s having a better time than you were,” the captain watched the smile playing around the full red lips of the sleeping girl.

“She’s too wise to touch your doughnuts,” Alan rejoined.

“There’s some of ’em left,” O’Neil advised. “Come on! Breakfast is ready.”

The three men were finishing the bacon and coffee, when a shadow filled the companionway of the little cabin and Paloma’s head appeared.

“Good morning, gentlemen!” she called down. “Have you nothing for a starving girl?”

“I’ll bring yours back to the cockpit, miss,” O’Neil apologized. “This hole is too dirty for ladies.”

As Alan sprang up the companionway and stood beside her on the deck, she offered him her hand.



## *CORONA DEL MAR*

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"I am sorry you had a nightmare," she whispered as they made their way aft, "and, while I may be as pretty as some pictures, I'm not beautiful."

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself for eavesdropping," a flush of red swept up Alan's cheeks.

"Just the same, it was nice of you to say it," she gave his arm a little squeeze. "It isn't every day one gets compliments before breakfast."

"How about going after them greasers?" O'Neil asked as he set the heaped tray on the taboret before Paloma's chair.

"Don't you think we can run over first to Corona?" she queried. "My cousin, Romero, will bring along our Granadians and a crowd will have no trouble rounding up those men, while they might try to fight you two."

"I think it's quite safe," O'Neil agreed. "The fishing boats are in by this time and there ain't much risk of their being picked up."

"Suppose we start, then," the girl suggested. "For my family must be much worried that I have not come."

## *THE WAKE OF THE SETTING SUN*

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Hoisting anchor, the *Albatross* slipped between the jagged rocks and, doubling the point, headed out to sea. The sun had risen and the channel lay sparkling and deserted under the rose-tinted glow. As Sarten fell away behind them, Jim called back and pointed. On the cliffs above the Southern Point, two forms were outlined.

“They look lonesome,” he drawled. “We’ll have to send some one over to keep ’em company.”

Sunk back in the steamer chairs, Alan and Paloma lay in comfortable silence.

Out on the horizon the long green mass of Corona del Mar grew steadily nearer. On the entire eastern side towards which the *Albatross* was approaching, it was bare of trees and sloped in emerald pasture lands up to a heavily forested mountain range that stretched along the western sea front. This ridge, starting from the small level plateaus at the southern and northern ends of the island, gradually arched its jagged spine until, midway, the bare summit towered several thousand feet above its pine-covered bases. Directly in the center of

## CORONA DEL MAR

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the range the forces that in by-gone eons heaved the island from the sea evidently had concentrated their effort and had driven far above the other peaks a colossal shaft of closely knit rose granite. Sharp and bold in its rugged outline, it seemed to be standing on tiptoe on the shoulders of its fellows, striving to touch with its dome-shaped head the even blue of space.

“What a splendid mountain!” Alan exclaimed enthusiastically.

“He is a fine old fellow,” Paloma’s face was flushed with the joy of her home-coming. “Our ancestor, the Comandador, named him the Mountain of the Sun, both because he seems to stretch his head up so to the sky, and because, right on the top, there are the ruins of an ancient Mexican sun temple.”

A stiff wind had sprung up abeam and the *Albatross* rolled steadily, throwing from her bows wisps of spray that floated off across the water. They were running by the Northern Point, which stuck its nose like a raised prow into the surf. On its tip of bare rock, perched high above the swirling swells, stood the hacienda or manor house of the de la Guerra

## THE WAKE OF THE SETTING SUN

family. Worn and grim, it seemed like a weather-beaten old mariner straining for a glimpse of shore.

Back from the point for a distance of half a mile the land formed a level plateau, rocky, swept by the hurricanes howling in from the Pacific. From the edge of this bare plateau, extending across nearly the entire neck and then following the range along the sea front to the southward, lay a dense forest of spruce and pine. Only on the eastern side towards the mainland had the trees been cleared and a road built skirting the rugged cliff. At the edge of the plateau this road sloped down into a snug little harbor in which several fishing boats were rocking at anchor, their triangular red sails flapping in the sun. Around the harbor and strung beside the road leading to the hacienda, groups of picturesque, low-lying cottages were clustered, built in the Granadian style, their walls of white stucco outlined by robin's-egg-blue shutters, their roofs of rose tile nestled among the palms and orange trees of their gardens.

As the *Albatross* slipped into the quiet waters



## CORONA DEL MAR

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under the lee of the shore, Paloma pointed across the swelling reaches of the range to where, like a bed of snow left by the fleeting winter, a patch of white showed against the blue green.

“See, my friend!” she seized his arm. “There is the main flock and those red dots moving on the edges are the vaqueros driving the sheep to some new feeding ground.”

“Are all your herders natives of Spain?” Alan asked.

“Those men you see are Granadians. You can tell them by the red shawls thrown over their shoulders. But our foreman, a man by the name of Gilmore, is a Yankee, and down at the Rancho del Sur, which includes the entire southern half of the island, we have that colony of Mexicans.”

They were running by the point of the harbor. It was ebb tide and patches of rock, streaked with seaweed and mussels, stuck dirty brown out of the clear, green waters. Over the floor of the bay fish were darting, flashes of silver against the golden brown. Finally, the engine stopped and the *Albatross* slipped

## THE WAKE OF THE SETTING SUN

quietly up to a long, rustic pier reaching out from the low, sandy shore. All was still but for a flock of pelicans squawking over a pile of clam shells on the beach. At the end of the pier an old man with a red bandanna bound around his head sat dangling his legs, gazing with a dreamy stare at the approaching craft.

“It seems like a city of the dead,” Paloma burst out anxiously. “Every one must be away except old crazy Lupos, who fishes all the day.”

Suddenly, at the land’s end of the pier, a tall figure in khaki riding clothes came hurrying out on the planking.

“It is my cousin,” Paloma exclaimed in a relieved tone. “I was afraid he and father were off on the range.”

The engine stopped and the *Albatross*, swinging smoothly in a circle, glided up to the dock. As the propeller, reversed, once again churned the waters to a soapy foam, the girl sprang lightly ashore and hastened towards the newcomer.

He was a young man, black-haired and sun-tanned, and he swung along the dock with a lithe, resilient gait that suggested great latent

force. As Paloma leaped up on the pier he had stopped for a second, stock-still, his mouth half open, his fine teeth showing white against the creamy smoothness of his sharply molded face. Then, springing forward, he caught both her hands in his own.

For a time the two kept up a rapid conversation in Spanish and by the gestures of Paloma towards the islet and by the looks the newcomer kept throwing in his direction, Alan could see that she was relating her experiences of their journey. As she proceeded further with her narrative, her companion's fingers kept tugging at his closely-cropped mustache and it was evident that he was greatly agitated over the attempt on one who, by the affectionate glance he threw on her, seemed very dear to him.

At length, the girl beckoned to Alan and, as he jumped up beside them, the Spaniard bowed formally with a click of his heels, then stepped forward and wrung his hand with a hearty grip.

"We thank you for what you have done for our señorita," he spoke earnestly. "She has been the victim of the feud between our Mexicans and our family. You may be sure they

## *THE WAKE OF THE SETTING SUN*

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shall pay for this," and the young Spaniard's bushy eyebrows contracted and the green around the iris shone dully.

"But how did they know I was coming?" Paloma questioned.

"They must have intercepted your telegrams. You know how the mail is left around down here on the dock. When they found you were arriving they realized their chance. Anyhow, we didn't know of your coming, for your father would have surely spoken to me about it when just this morning we were planning a trip to San Diego for to-morrow."

"How is father?"

The Spaniard hesitated.

"He isn't ill?" Paloma burst out anxiously.

"No! Oh, no!" Romero hastened to assure her. "Only, I am thinking that you will find him greatly changed. He has worried much lately and it has aged him."

"But what has been the cause?" Paloma asked. "There has always been the trouble with the Mexicans and it never ruffled him. What has happened?"



“I know not,” the young Spaniard replied.  
“Your father is a very reticent man.”

“Where is father?”

“Off on the range. We are going to San Diego to-morrow to buy some wire fencing for those tar fields in Sycamore Cañon. He is getting the measurements now.”

“Then you shall come with me to the hacienda.” Paloma turned to Alan. “Father will never forgive me if I do not give him the chance to thank you, and you will have plenty of time to reach San Diego to-night. Come, let us be on our way. My duenna is at the hacienda and she will give us some luncheon.”

“Doña Mencia is in the village,” Romero interposed. “I met her going in the supply store just before I happened down here. Suppose we all walk up now. I must collect a gang of our herders to go after those men.”

At the end of the pier they skirted the corrals and followed the road around the bay to the little village. Sheltered by the plateau, the air was hot and full of the hum of myriads of bees hovering before the rambler roses that daubed with soft pink the cream sides of the stuccoed

## *THE WAKE OF THE SETTING SUN*

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houses. In the courtyards, children were sprawled beneath the drooping palms, aimlessly scooping holes in the crumbling dirt. Coming out into a little square, they crossed to a long adobe building beside a huge corral. At their approach, a moth-eaten shepherd dog rose from the porch and wagged his tail.

As they reached the steps, a figure came out of the doorway. She was a petite little woman in old-fashioned brocade, like a dainty marquise of Sèvres porcelain. Over her dulled, silvery hair, a flowing mantilla of Castillian lace hung to her high slippers. The aristocratic poise of her head, the Roman nose, the finely cut mouth and chin, all bespoke breeding and ancient race. Her gray eyes were clear, her skin firm and fresh; in spite of her seventy years she still retained a trace of the bloom of her youth.

At the sight of Paloma her pupils dilated as if she had seen a ghost. For an instant she swayed slightly and leaned against the door. Then, as the girl left her companions standing and sprang up the steps, she gave a broken cry and folded her in her arms.

## CHAPTER IX

### THE HACIENDA

AS the two women conversed in rapid phrases, Alan glanced around the little square. On the opposite side, beneath an open thatch-roofed pavilion, a circle of picturesquely-costumed Granadian women were spinning the gray thread into homespun cloth and singing at their work.

“We are very primitive,” Romero commented. “I suppose our civilization is about where the Comandador left it three hundred years ago. We have much to learn from our northern neighbors.”

“And much to lose,” Alan rejoined. “Compare these workers with the wretches in our sweatshops and you must admit that so-called civilization has not made a much better animal out of man.”

“My cousin wishes to present you,” the Span-

## *THE WAKE OF THE SETTING SUN*

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iard motioned to the two ladies coming down the steps.

“Aunt Mencia,” Paloma took the older woman by the arm as Alan, hat in hand, advanced. “This gentleman is Dr. Lethbridge of whom I have been speaking. Dr. Lethbridge, I wish to present you to my aunt, Doña Mencia Carillo.”

“I salute you, señor,” the little figure bowed gravely. “I wish I could make you know how I feel towards you for what you have done for my Paloma.”

“Please don’t mention it,” Alan colored and fumbled with the brim of his hat.

“Pardon, but I think I had better be moving,” Romero interrupted. “Will you tell Don Alvarez that I have taken some of the hands and have gone after those two Mexicans?”

“I regret that we must give our señor this new worry,” Doña Mencia shook her head thoughtfully. “I had hoped he would get some sleep to-night.”

“Is he ill?” Paloma asked anxiously.

“He is fast worrying himself ill,” the older woman replied. “He looks so drawn and worn



## THE HACIENDA

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and last night I know he did not close his eyes because I myself got up at four and went along to his room to try to make him stop poring over those wretched papers on his desk."

"But what is bothering him?" Paloma asked.

"The obstinate man will not tell me," the señora answered. "He exasperated me so last night, killing himself this way, that I spoke out my mind. But he just smiled and patted my hand and all I could get from him was that his troubles would soon be over and that to-night he would promise to rest like a baby. If he learns of this attempt on you, Paloma, I dread lest he be so stirred up that he will not sleep."

"How long has he been worrying?" the girl questioned.

"Ever since the *City of Mexico* touched here over a week ago. He must have received bad news for, since then, he has acted as if a great burden were crushing his mind."

"Perhaps we had better wait until morning before troubling him about me," Paloma suggested. "Now I am home there is no danger and my cousin can bring those Mexicans over

## *THE WAKE OF THE SETTING SUN*

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this afternoon and question them. What do you think, Romero?"

"I can see no harm in waiting," the young man agreed. "The señor would not like such matters kept from him for long, but, until morning, when he will have had a good sleep, I think you are right not to tell him."

"Then we will wait," Paloma declared.

"Good-by, señor," Romero shook hands cordially with Alan. "I may be back late and will not see you, but I trust you will honor us with a long visit when your plans permit. Now I must be off. For we do not want to let some passing fishing boat take those men to safety."

"Come up this evening and tell us what luck you had," Paloma called, and the well-knit figure started towards the wool storehouse, against which a handful of men were leaning.

Slowly, the two ladies and Alan passed across the square and out along the road skirting the bay. The languid scent of spring was in the heavy air and the curtains beside the blue shutters of the cottages hung limp and drowsy. Gradually the dwellings became more scattered and they started to zigzag up the

## THE HACIENDA

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cliff to the plateau of the Northern Point. At a sharp turn, driving before him a tiny donkey buried under a mountain of wicker-covered demijohns, a sturdy peasant suddenly came upon them. His uncut beard spreading over his short velvet jacket and the clumsy silver rings in his ears gave him the air of a brigand. Quickly withdrawing his hands from the pockets of his knee breeches, he respectfully stepped aside to let them pass.

A five-minute climb and they came up to the bleak plateau that reached back from the Northern Point to the fringe of the great forest. For a stretch the road picked its way along the eastern bluff, then veered across the plateau to the hacienda, which, out on the edge of the land's end, hung stern and grim above the restless Pacific. Of one story, built around a court in the form of a double L, the long low-hung building seemed to be holding out its arms to keep from slipping over into the breakers below. The walls were of rough-hewn granite outlined by thick layers of mortar. Once the stone had been blue and the mortar white; but time had painted both with the warm colors of

## *THE WAKE OF THE SETTING SUN*

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antiquity. Heavy pink tiles weighted down the roof and gave to the manor a false impression of being squat and low. Around the court the roof projected far beyond the walls and, resting on massive, square pillars, formed a covered arcade that offered the sole means of communication between the several apartments. The floor of the arcade was raised from the ground and paved with Sienna-red flagging, while the set-in side walls were stuccoed and tinted to mellow cream. Through them opened iron-studded doors of weathered oak, finished with curiously wrought handles and huge clumsy locks.

Over the rock of the inner court a thick layer of rich earth had been spread and roses and exotic plants crowded one another in carefree confusion. From the loop of the road swinging before the hacienda a broad path of stone dalles wound through the center of the court to the middle of the main façade. Here a flight of three steps led up on to the floor of the arcade at a point where double doors opened into the great reception and living room. Carved on their massive panels was the coat-of-arms of the



## THE HACIENDA

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de la Guerra family, a lone pine quartered with a lion rampant and the inscription "*Deus fortes amat.*"

"What splendid views!" Alan exclaimed as they passed between the tall date palms.

"Are they not?" the girl smiled, happy at his enthusiasm. "From our sleeping rooms out there in the right wing, it is just like being on board ship."

Halfway up the broad path of stone a brightly garbed Granadian woman came out of the kitchens in the left wing and hung up several strings of peppers, which made bright streaks of red and green against the soft cream walls. Bowing to Paloma's greeting she followed the driveway before the court and continued down to the stone group of servants' quarters and stables, sunk in the hollow of the plateau a hundred yards from the main house.

"You children go right into the dining room," Doña Mencia said as they climbed the low steps to the red flagging of the arcade. "There is Hakamura now, and luncheon is ready."

## *THE WAKE OF THE SETTING SUN*

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“Who is Hakamura?” the girl questioned, as a diminutive Oriental came towards them.

“He is our new butler. When Pedro died, our Granadians were so valuable as herders that your father imported this Japanese from San Diego.”

“Hakamura,” she added, “this is your mistress, Señorita Paloma. Take her bag to her apartment and add two places for luncheon.”

Passing before the reception hall, they entered the spacious dining room. Wainscoted in weathered oak, with paneled portraits of the Seigneur of Corona del Mar, the massive sideboards and ornate carved silver gave out an atmosphere of somber, old-world richness. On the ocean front, the walls had been replaced by heavy plate glass doors that pushed back and gave access to the terrace outside.

Crossing the room, Alan stepped beneath the striped green awning where the long wicker chairs and the water swirling around his feet gave him the impression of being on the after deck of a yacht. For a time, he stood gazing over the sweeping expanse of ocean, sparkling blue in the beating sunshine. Then, drawing

## *THE HACIENDA*

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in a full breath of salt-soaked air, he joined the ladies at the long refectory table and attacked eagerly the excellent lunch served by the silent Hakamura.

As they finished the avogadros, Doña Mencia rose and announced her intention of driving down to the village in the hope of meeting Señor de la Guerra, while Paloma led Alan to the great terrace where coffee was waiting. Against the cliff below, the breakers were booming steadily, throwing up a gossamer mist of spray on which the sun painted dissolving rainbows. Beneath the awning they reclined in the easy chairs, Alan full of the beauty of the sweeping ocean, strangely moved by the presence of the girl by his side; she, gay, quite unmindful of her experience of the day before. Through the long afternoon they talked until, at length, the doctor gave a little start and looked at his watch.

“Good Lord,” he burst out. “It’s almost five and I must be back in San Diego to-night.”

“I have been selfish to keep you,” Paloma admitted, rising. “Only it wasn’t all because I wanted you for myself, you know, but a little

## *THE WAKE OF THE SETTING SUN*

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because I had the hope that father would be returned and that he could meet you as he will so wish to do. Only, if you promise to come again to me some day, I will let you go. And you do promise, my friend, not so? For I fear somehow that you will not want to come back.”

“Want to come back?” Alan faced her. “Why, you know I—I—hang it all, you know perfectly well I——”

“There, I shouldn’t have been teasing to you,” she interrupted him, her face suddenly serious. “Please forgive me, my friend.”

“But I don’t want to forgive you,” Alan protested earnestly. “I only wish I could make you know what this meeting you has meant to me. But I am not much on talking and the words that come to me seem too commonplace, too worn out, to tell you what I feel. Oh! If I could only invent some new words, some unknown words that no one had ever used before and would never use again. Then, perhaps, I could——”

“There, please don’t!” the girl murmured gravely. “I made you say all this, you know. And we have just been making fun, not so?”



## THE HACIENDA

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“But I am not making fun and you know I——”

“Please!” She laid her hand gently on his sleeve. “I believe you are sincere, my friend, and I am happy for it. But, really, you think what you do about me because you have met me in so strange a way. And in a few minutes you will be going away and probably you will never come back. And the end will be you will carry away with you the remembrance of a girl you cared about for a day because she was foreign and different. And when you think of her—for you will think of her—often at first—then once in a while—then almost never—then you will say to yourself: ‘She was a nice girl.’ And that will be all, not so, my friend?” And she smiled at him and gave his arm a little pat.

As Alan opened his lips to protest, the door swung wide and a man strode into the dining room. He was of medium height, and in his youth must have been straight as a pine, with square, powerful shoulders. But age had bent him, and beneath the bushy brows the sunken eyes shone feverishly from among furrowed

## *THE WAKE OF THE SETTING SUN*

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wrinkles. And in spite of his waxed mustaches and a pointed, Van Dyke beard, which gave him the air of a retired officer, he looked drawn, haggard, worn.

Holding back the door, the newcomer stood aside and bowed while Doña Mencia, with a stately little courtesy, passed before him into the room. As his tired eyes swept around him, the señor gave an exclamation of satisfaction and came forward out on to the terrace.

“Dr. Lethbridge, is it not so?” he began in his nervous emphatic way, gripping Alan’s hand in both his own. “What good fortune is mine, that still I find you here. The señora has told me what you have done on the train for my little girl and it would have grieved me much if you had left before I had told you what is in my heart.”

“Really, Don Alvarez,” Alan replied, embarrassed, “I am afraid Doña Mencia has been making me out a hero, when, Heaven knows, I am far from one.”

The wrinkles about the corners of the tired eyes deepened and the señor shot an appraising glance of approval at the clean-cut man

## THE HACIENDA

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before him. Then, without answering, he gave his hand a final pressure and turned to his daughter.

“I am so glad,” he murmured with a break in his voice as the girl sprang into his outstretched arms. “My dear little girl, I am so, so glad.” And he pressed her convulsively to him and kissed the soft, lustrous hair.

“But why did we not receive the message that you were coming? I must look into this. Lately, many things are happening strangely.”

“But come, señor,” he added, still standing with his arm around Paloma’s shoulders. “The señora tells me that you must return to-day. Surely you can do us the honor of accepting our hospitality this night, for my nephew and myself leave at four-thirty to-morrow morning for San Diego and, as our launch is a fast one, we could land you before seven, which will be as early as your friends would probably start. If you do not mind the unchristian hour, why not send your boat back with a message and give us the happiness of a little glimpse of you until you can return for a longer visit?”

“You are very kind,” Alan replied appre-

## *THE WAKE OF THE SETTING SUN*

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ciatively, “and really, Don Alvarez, I should like to stay. But are you sure you were planning to leave so early?”

“Quite sure, señor. And I shall have one of my men take a message to the captain of your boat so that he may carry word to your friend. And now allow me to show you your room, for the evening meal will soon be ready.”



## CHAPTER X

### THE WHISPERED WHISTLE

**A**FTER dinner they entered the great living room of the hacienda. In the subdued half-light, the beamed, oak ceiling seemed lost in the darkness above. Against the warm buff of the rough plaster hung paintings of madonnas and warriors in tarnished gold frames. Over the brown tiled floor, soft-toned oriental rugs were scattered, their edges frayed by the tread of centuries. The sea-face of the room was opened by high window-doors, but the drawn curtains cast over all a deep shadow. Around the sides were ranged curiously carved chairs and chests, satiny with age. One end was occupied by a huge fireplace of round, cobbled rock, with a soapstone mantel. A few paces before the fireplace, a long leather sofa backed against a huge oak table, on which reposed a tall lamp and numerous ornaments of old Spain. The general air of extreme old

## *THE WAKE OF THE SETTING SUN*

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age caused to harmonize these things which one felt were accustomed for centuries to live together and grow used to one another.

Grouped around the fireplace they sipped their coffee and conversed of trivial things, except Don Alvarez who, subdued, absent, kept gazing thoughtfully before him as if following some bothering fancies beyond the flickering dancing of the flames. The others had evidently been struck by this mood, unusual in the genial old señor, for Paloma had slipped to the arm of his chair and putting her hand around his shoulders had whispered something in his ear. Quickly he had looked up into her eyes and patted her hand.

“Nothing, dear,” he had whispered as his firm, set mouth relaxed into a tender smile. “Don’t worry! I will tell you all about it when I get the chance. Now you have your guest to think of.”

Presently he arose and crossing to Alan held out his hand. “Matters of importance are waiting upon me,” he apologized, “and I must beg your permission to attend to them before some needed sleep. You must persuade my

## *THE WHISPERED WHISTLE*

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daughter to sing for you, señor doctor; then, I am sure you will forget her old father ever lived. Good night, señor. Till to-morrow at breakfast.”

And kissing Paloma affectionately and bowing gravely to Doña Mencia he passed out on to the arcade.

“There must be something very serious have happened,” Paloma looked into the fire. “He has lost so much weight and looks so drawn and worn. When he returns from San Diego, I must take him in hand.”

“I am glad you have returned,” the old lady said earnestly. “For he has changed so the past week that I have been truly worried.”

Out across the court the sound of a horse’s hoofs beat on the graveled driveway, and a moment later the well-knit figure of Romero de la Guerra passed through the screen doors.

“Did you catch them?” Paloma questioned eagerly, as he advanced towards the fireplace.

“I am sorry,” he explained regretfully. “We had a big gang and beat through every inch of that island. They were gone.”

“But how could they have gotten away?”

## *THE WAKE OF THE SETTING SUN*

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“They probably hailed some fishing boat going over to the mainland.”

“Could you find out who they were?”

“Evidently two Mexicans from the Southern Ranch. Sanchez, whose boat they stole, said he saw a couple of men answering their description hanging around the cove some days ago. When I return to my quarters at the Southern Ranch I shall check off the men and see who is missing. There is no doubt that the fellow with the scar is Ruiz, who runs the pump house in dry weather. It sounds like him. But I want the name of the other one.”

“But why should these men have attacked me?”

“I don’t know. Where is your father?”

“He has retired to work.”

“I think your father had a quarrel with this Ruiz over something. Didn’t he say anything about him when you told him about the matter?”

“We decided, you know, not to worry father until you returned.”

“That’s so. I will talk matters over with him on our trip over to-morrow.”



## *THE WHISPERED WHISTLE*

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“You will spend the night here?” Doña Mencia asked.

“Thank you! I intended sleeping on the boat.”

“But what an absurd idea!” Paloma broke in. “Our beds are surely better than those hard bunks. Anton will go for your bag.”

“And you must do as your father said, Paloma,” Doña Mencia added. “She really sings well, señor doctor.”

Seated at the antique Spanish spinet that, like the little old lady, still retained the sweet-toned freshness of its youth, Paloma sang. Her voice was smooth and rich with the throaty tone of an old 'cello, and, as she swung into a dance ballata of Andalusia, Alan leaned forward, the blood coursing through his veins. As she trailed away into a soft Granadian love song, Romero sprang to his feet and, resting his elbows on the top of the piano, blended his clear, resonant tenor with her own. In waves the color rippled across his olive cheeks and the girl, also swayed by the troubling movement of the song, looked him full in the eyes and smiled.

With a great rake clawing at his heart, Alan

## THE WAKE OF THE SETTING SUN

watched and listened. Evidently they were engaged and the man had a right to the warm, caressing glance of possession with which he enveloped her.

“Do you not like our song?” Paloma looked over her shoulder. “Why do you sit there looking so glum as if you had seen a spook?”

“Do I like your song?” Alan, with a start, half rose, then sank back again on the sofa. “Oh, I like it. Please sing some more. Oh, yes, I like it.”

For a moment the girl darted a puzzled quiz-zical glance at him; then, a slight smile played around the corners of her mouth and she dropped her eyes to the keyboard and began a spinning song of a maiden whose lover is departing for the wars against the Moors.

“That is much too sad,” Romero broke in, as the last note died away. “Let us try our duet of the gypsy and her *rom*. I don’t think the señor doctor has ever heard a Romany ballad.”

“I think we have sung enough,” the girl said, pushing back from the piano. “I am afraid we have bored our guest.”

## *THE WHISPERED WHISTLE*

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“How can you say that?” Alan sprang to his feet and faced her. “For you must believe me when I tell you that for the first time to-night I have known what music really means.”

“It was nice of you to say that,” Paloma replied more seriously, “and I am glad you cared for it and some day I will sing to you again. But now the hour is late for those who rise at four. So come, or there will be no night to bring us counsel.”

Out over the arcade the moon was shining, bathing the court with floods of mellow light. Against the deep blue black of space Sun Mountain towered above the pines. Around its summit light veils of mist floated like tenuous scarfs of tulle.

As they passed the apartment of Don Alvarez, they could see the old señor poring over some papers on the great oak table-desk.

“I shall not disturb him to-night,” Paloma said, “but now that I am home he must not work like this.”

At the room beyond they stopped.

“Hakamura has brought your things in here,” Doña Mencia explained. “If there is

## *THE WAKE OF THE SETTING SUN*

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anything you wish, please let me know. The drinking water is on the night stand by the lamp and I trust, señor doctor, that you will have pleasant dreams.”

For a short time he stood pensive just inside the threshold. From the garden below came the pungent smell of verbena blended with the clean freshness of the soil wet from the shower just passed. At the next door along the court the ladies were bidding good night to the young Spaniard. Then their steps gradually died away around the arcade.

Passing before the great four-poster, Alan crossed the lofty, bare, tinted room to the window opening on the sea front. The breakers were bellowing steadily around the rocks and, from the black waters two hundred feet below, puffs of spray were spouting. As he returned to the court window, he heard steps coming up the walk and in the faint lamplight creeping out on the flagging he saw the figure of a very tall, gaunt man mount the steps and, without knocking, enter the señor's room. As Alan removed his clothes, he could hear the two talking, their voices a low rumble through the thick wall.



## *THE WHISPERED WHISTLE*

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And this steady rumble soothed the pounding of his temples as he lay between the snowy sheets wondering at the strangeness of fate that should have brought into his life the daughter of this old Spanish family.

He had slept he knew not how long when he was half-awakened by a curious noise outside his window. It was as if some one were whistling to attract another's attention, yet silencing the whistle, muffling it—a whispered whistle if such a thing were possible. Semiconscious of the sound, he rolled on his side, pulled the bed clothes over his ear and was relapsing into slumber when he was brought bolt upright in bed by the thud of a body falling in the next room and a muffled cry for help.

## CHAPTER XI

### A BLOW FROM THE UNKNOWN

**A**S Alan sprang from the bed, there was a crash in the shrubbery by the steps and the thumping sound of running on the soft lawn. With a bound he crossed the room and burst out into the arcade. A leaking fog had sunk over the island and the moon shone drowned and sickly, casting a ghastly, grayish glare upon the court. Alan paused and listened intently, his senses fully awake. Through the narrow, iron-barred windows of Don Alvarez' room he could hear stifled groans and bodies lashing around on the floor. Before the señor's door something was moving. Gradually his eyes grew accustomed to the half light and he could see it was a man fumbling with a key in the lock. Tiptoeing quietly he jumped at the crouching figure and seized him by the shoulders.

As the wan moon glow fell full upon his face

## *A BLOW FROM THE UNKNOWN*

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the man drew in his breath with a hissing sound. It was Hakamura, the Japanese butler, his face sulphur yellow in the dim light.

“What are you doing?” Alan questioned sharply, still holding the Oriental’s shoulders in a clutch of iron. “Why are you trying to lock that door?”

“I no try lock,” the man mumbled, as he withdrew the key. “He already locked. I try open. No can do.”

Releasing his grip, the doctor shook the door. It did not budge. Throwing himself against the solid oak, he rebounded with a gasp.

“We must get to him,” he declared, moving along the wall. “Try the window. You may be able to wiggle through.”

Clambering to the narrow ledge, the Japanese squirmed and twisted against the heavy bars. “No use, sir doctor,” he panted, jumping down beside Alan. “No can do.”

In a streak of chalky moonlight filtering in through the bars of the black room, Alan could make out a body lying doubled up beneath the table, rolling from side to side in agony.

## *THE WAKE OF THE SETTING SUN*

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“Don Alvarez!” he called. “What’s the matter? Can’t you open the door?”

A half-muttered moan was the only answer.

“We’ve just got to get to him,” the doctor repeated. “You go tell Miss Paloma and I will wake Señor Romero. If they have no key, we must get something to smash in that door.”

The disturbance had evidently aroused the ladies, for as he hurried past his own room to that of the young Spaniard beyond, lights were showing in the apartments out at the end of the court.

“What is it?” came a sleepy voice as Alan beat vigorously on the door.

“Get up and come out quick,” the doctor shouted.

“What’s the matter?” Romero inquired as he thumped across the floor and stuck his head out.

“Something serious has happened to Don Alvarez and his door is locked and we can’t get in. Have you a revolver and a key?”

“I have a revolver, but no key, but my cousin doubtless has. Here she is now!”

“What is it, doctor?” the girl questioned



## *A BLOW FROM THE UNKNOWN*

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anxiously. "Hakamura says something has happened to father and that you cannot open his door. I have no key."

"We'll break in then," Romero concluded as, pulling on his dressing gown and slipping a revolver in the pocket, he stepped out beside them and started along the court.

"Hold on! You can't do it with your shoulder," Alan hurried after him. "We will have to get a beam or fence-post or something. That door is three inches of solid wood."

"My God, there is some one in there attacking him!" Romero burst forth as the sounds of the bodies thudding over the floor floated through the open window. Drawing back, the Spaniard crashed his lithe, powerful body against the oak. The panel creaked, he cried out with pain, but the door held firmly.

"Haven't any of the servants a key?" he panted.

"Hakamura might have." Paloma turned to the diminutive Japanese who had moved over towards the railing.

"I have two key. No fit door. I try open when doctor he come."

## *THE WAKE OF THE SETTING SUN*

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“Let’s take a look at them,” Romero ordered.

“They no fit. I try,” Hakamura protested.

“Give up those keys, you Jap,” the Spaniard thundered, seizing him roughly by the shoulder.

The little yellow man reached in his pocket and produced two large, massive keys. For a second Romero fumbled with the lock.

“This one certainly doesn’t fit,” he mumbled, throwing it on the flagstones. “Let’s see about the other.” The key turned easily and the lock snapped back.

“What do you mean by saying the keys wouldn’t fit?” he rose and faced the Japanese. “We’ll attend to you later,” he added as he tried to push open the door. It stuck. Impatiently hurling his shoulder against it, he pitched into the room flat on his face.

Quickly Alan stepped inside the threshold while the Spaniard scrambled to his knees.

“Keep me covered and don’t let any one get out,” the doctor ordered. “Now, Hakamura, light the lamp.”

“Do as you’re told, or I’ll put a bullet in you,” Romero snapped as the Oriental paused beside him, hesitating.

## *A BLOW FROM THE UNKNOWN*

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“Watch him!” Alan cautioned. “Hurry up now! Light the lamp.”

Romero settled on his heels, his head swinging from side to side, his leveled revolver following his eyes. Cautiously the Japanese slid along the wall and crossed to the big table in the center of the room. A match scratched and crackled and a trembling flicker lighted up his distorted face. Removing the chimney, his shaking fingers strove to ignite the wick. As the line of flame flowed around the circle, Alan leaned forward eagerly.

The sight that met his eyes made him draw back, staring. Between the broad table-desk and the four-poster the night stand lay overturned, while the rugs on the floor were in wild disorder. The bed was in confusion, the clothes tossed as if caught in a reaping machine. Beneath the table lay the Señor de la Guerra. He was flat on his back and kept drawing up first one knee, then the other; then extending both straight out with a snapping of the joints. His eyes were closed, his face twisted with agony. Unconscious of those

## *THE WAKE OF THE SETTING SUN*

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present he kept rolling his head over and back again.

Paloma had paused in the open doorway and stood peering over her cousin's shoulder. At sight of her father she uttered a cry and started forward. In her eagerness to reach the writhing man, she stumbled over Romero's foot. With an exclamation he whirled and covered her with his revolver. Then, turning swiftly, he again swung his head from side to side around the great room.

"Better keep back, Miss Paloma," Alan advised, his eyes sweeping the half-lighted spaces. "The man who attacked your father is in here."

"You take this gun and I'll search the room." Romero half rose.

"I'll do the searching," Alan rejoined. "You keep me covered."

"If you see any one," the Spaniard advised, "keep away so I can shoot."

Cautiously, Alan felt his way around the left wall of the lofty room. Carefully he lifted up the flounces of the bed, poked into the wardrobe and pulled back the long curtains. At the further end he stepped out on the balcony where



## *A BLOW FROM THE UNKNOWN*

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the sea was slapping against the rocks two hundred feet below; then back along the other wall towards the tensely watching group just inside the threshold.

“Look out! He’s in that closet,” Romero cautioned, as Alan fingered the knob of a tall door opening into the wall. “Open it quick and jump aside.”

As the hinges creaked and the doctor threw himself to the right, the Spaniard raised his arm. For a second he held it leveled, then slowly lowered it again.

“Holy Mary, what does it mean?” Paloma burst out.

“It means that we were mistaken, that’s all,” Alan concluded, relaxing. “There is no one in this room. Come, help me!”

Gently the two men lifted Don Alvarez and carried him over to the massive bed.

“What is it, father?” Paloma pushed aside her cousin and took the hand of the half-conscious man. “Tell us what has happened.”

At the sound of her voice, Don Alvarez’ eyelids fluttered and his lips moved. Then, with

## *THE WAKE OF THE SETTING SUN*

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a paroxysm of pain, he twisted and moaned and his pupils took on a curious, glassy stare.

“What is it, doctor? What is the matter with him?” the girl gasped, a sob in her voice.

“Get some brandy,” he ordered sharply.

As Hakamura hurried on the errand, Alan sat on the edge of the bed and, placing his ear against the old man’s chest, listened. Then he pinched the skin of the body, which had taken on a yellowish tinge, and again he placed his fingers on the pulse.

“He isn’t going to die?” Paloma whispered, agonized. “Oh, doctor, don’t let him die!”

“I’ll do my best,” Alan murmured. “Here, help me give him this.”

Gently he raised the señor’s head from the pillow. Then, as Paloma slipped up on the bed with her back against the headboard, he lowered it slowly to her lap. Taking the bottle of brandy from Hakamura, he pushed apart Don Alvarez’ lips and forced the opening between the clenched teeth. Then he stepped back and gazed thoughtfully at the figure before him. Gradually over the yellowish face stole a flush of purple and the glassy film of unconsciousness

## *A BLOW FROM THE UNKNOWN*

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kept slipping from and covering again the deep brown eyes.

“What happened?” Alan firmly shook the old gentleman’s shoulders. For a flash he stared up into the doctor’s face.

“Come, señor, rouse yourself,” Alan called in his ear, spacing his words. “You must tell us what happened.”

The old man was fighting the stupor that was again closing over his senses and he was struggling to talk. But from his lips, frothy at the corners, came meaningless, gurgling sounds.

“My father, tell us,” Paloma pleaded. “Who attacked you?”

At the sound of her voice he again opened his eyes and, gritting his teeth, half rose on one elbow.

“He—he—he’ll,” he gasped.

Then hiccoughs strangled him and he collapsed, great beads of sweat standing out on his candle-colored brow.

“Let me take him,” Alan ordered, lifting Don Alvarez’ head and supporting him bolt upright against the pillow while the girl slipped

## *THE WAKE OF THE SETTING SUN*

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down from the bed and moved over beside Doña Mencia.

Once more the doctor reached for the flask and tried to force the brandy down the señor's throat. But his teeth were clenched like a vise and he could not pry them apart. The old man's breathing was becoming more and more labored and his body twitched jerkily. His pulse, at first pounding and racing, gradually began to skip and beat irregularly. Suddenly a rattle sounded in his throat, a quiver ran through his frame and, with a snap, he bent backwards, his head and shoulders jerking from the doctor's grasp and falling limp over the sideboard of the bed. Stooping, Alan lifted the stiffened figure to the pillow. Then he stepped back reverently for Señor de la Guerra was dead, a fringe of froth lying in a layer on his lips.



## CHAPTER XII

### DR. LETHBRIDGE MAKES AN UNEXPECTED DIAGNOSIS

**I**N the shadow-filled room there was silence. Somewhere out over the Northern Point an owl hooted mournfully. From over by the window came a half-choked gasp and the rapid sucking in of breath between clenched teeth. At the sound, the group bending over the great four-poster whirled like puppets fastened to the same rod. Against the dark wall Hakamura was backed, his eyes bulging.

“Be quiet, you!” Romero cursed him softly under his breath as they turned again to the ghastly, stiffened figure on the bed. All at once Paloma pushed aside the restraining grasp of Doña Mencia and advanced, shoving one foot before the other like a walker on thin ice. Hesitatingly, she stretched out her hand; then pulled it back with a jerk as a child afraid to touch an insect.

## *THE WAKE OF THE SETTING SUN*

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“Holy Mary, it is not my father,” she whispered, so low that Alan could just catch her words. “Señor doctor, say there is some mistake.”

Alan looked at her pityingly without answering.

“But he is gone?” she seized Alan’s wrist. “Is he dead?”

As the doctor slowly bowed his head, she let his hand fall and drew erect as though stiffened by some high-powered current. For a second she swayed back and forth and he stepped quickly closer and put his arm around her shoulders. But, gently pushing away his support, she bent over and closed the glassy, bulging eyes. Then, clenching her fingers, she stooped and kissed the disheveled, snow-white hair. No sound came from her half-open lips as, with a shudder, she drew back and held out her hand to Doña Mencia. Unresisting, the older woman led the girl out on the arcade to a stone bench beside the railing. Staggering slightly she sank down, staring straight ahead, her lips fluttering like the wings of a humming bird. Suddenly, with a little broken cry, she

## *AN UNEXPECTED DIAGNOSIS*

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threw both her arms around her aunt's neck and her body shook with convulsive sobs.

The air was suave and warm and the insects of the night filled the beflowered court with their numbing buzzing. Tenderly Doña Mencia held close the stricken girl. Swaying backward and forward, she kept crooning softly as in those days long, long ago when she had soothed Paloma in her little cradle. Gradually the sobs ceased, a slight quiver ran through her body and, with a little choking sigh, the girl lay still like a child asleep at its mother's breast.

All at once, with sudden resolution, she sprang to her feet and called to the men still within her father's room.

"What does it all mean?" she demanded, as Alan and Romero came out to meet her. "He was quite well an hour ago. Why is he dead now?"

"I don't know," Alan answered gravely.

"Do you think he was attacked?"

"There are no wounds on him that would have caused his death."

"But why did you tell me to keep out because the man who had attacked father was inside?"

## *THE WAKE OF THE SETTING SUN*

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“When we burst in and found your father lying half-conscious, naturally we supposed that some one had assaulted him. What else could we think?”

“Do you believe that now?”

“It seems impossible.” Alan shook his head decisively. “In the first place there are no marks on his body that could have caused his death; there is no opening into another room; escape through the windows is out of the question; and his door was locked on the inside for we have just found the key on the floor beside the overturned night stand where the señor had laid it when he retired.”

“Yes, but his door could have been opened and locked from the outside,” Romero objected. “Remember there are other keys.”

“That is so,” Alan agreed thoughtfully. “Where is Hakamura?”

“Along by the pillar there.”

“Let’s have him here and have a talk with him.”

“Hakamura, these gentlemen wish to ask you a few questions,” Paloma explained, as the little man approached.



## *AN UNEXPECTED DIAGNOSIS*

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“What were you doing when I found you before the señor’s door?” Alan began.

“I hear master very sick inside. I try unlock him.”

“Well, why didn’t you?”

“I have two key. When I try, both no good.”

“Yet one fitted the lock perfectly.”

“I know. Perhaps I hurry too fast get to master.”

“Come, tell the truth,” Romero burst in. “Tell us what you were up to in the señor’s room before you came out and locked the door as the doctor caught you doing.”

“I no in room,” the man’s voice trembled. “Honest God, I just go sleep in hammock outside kitchen when I hear cry and man run. Then I hurry quick and try unlock door and sir doctor he come.”

“Stop your lying and tell us why you attacked Don Alvarez.” Romero gripped the Oriental by the neck.

“I no kill my master,” the little figure pleaded.

“Well then, who was in the room with you?”

## *THE WAKE OF THE SETTING SUN*

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Tell me or I'll break every bone in your carcass."

"Honest God, I no know. I just try open door when doctor he come."

"That will do," Paloma interposed as Romero raised his hand. "Perhaps he tells the truth and I don't want you to hurt him."

"We'll get it out of you later." The Spaniard reluctantly released his grip on the Japanese, who slunk along the arcade.

"Do you think he is guilty of carrying harm to father?" Paloma questioned as his steps died away.

"Of course he is," Romero declared. "He was locking the door, not trying to open it, when the doctor found him."

"But why should he wish to harm the señor?" Doña Mencia interposed. "Ever since he engaged him some months ago, Don Alvarez has been most kind to him and Hakamura has apparently appreciated it. And a man does not kill his fellow being except for a reason."

"They say the Japanese are trying to get these Mexican islands for naval bases," Romero suggested.

## *AN UNEXPECTED DIAGNOSIS*

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“What an absurd idea,” Paloma interposed. “How could Hakamura, alone, get possession of this island?”

“Not so absurd if he were the forerunner of others,” Alan said. “You know you are cut off out here and apparently no one on the mainland knows or cares what happens. Still, it does seem that any such explanation is unlikely.”

“Would you advise seizing him?” Paloma asked.

“I wouldn’t do that,” Alan advised. “Of course he might have had some personal grudge against the señor that we don’t know anything about. But in any case the boats can be guarded and, unless we get something more definite to go on, I think it is the best plan to let him alone and watch him. Also, it is possible that we are all on the wrong track and that no one harmed Don Alvarez for I could find no mark of violence on him that would have caused his death.”

“Are you sure of that?” the girl questioned.

“No, not sure. I have only made a hurried examination and a blow on the head might not

## *THE WAKE OF THE SETTING SUN*

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leave much of a mark in such a case as this where the subject died so quickly.”

“Could it have been a stroke of apoplexy?” Doña Mencia suggested.

“It is possible,” Alan admitted, “but the muscles are flexed like piano wire and there are other curious symptoms. Frankly, I don’t know; but if you will allow me to perform a post-mortem, I shall possibly be able to tell. May I do so?”

“But certainly, my friend,” Paloma grasped his hand impulsively. “You are very kind to us in our trouble and it means so much to have your help. Only I regret this upset of your plans.”

“Please don’t speak of such a thing,” Alan declared emphatically. “Doña Mencia, will you send two basins of water and some towels and have a long kitchen table brought to the señor’s apartment? I will go to my room now and get a few instruments and drugs which I always carry in my grip and, Miss Paloma, I think you had better take your final leave of your father. When I have finished, it will not be easy for you to see him again for I shall put his remains



## *AN UNEXPECTED DIAGNOSIS*

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in the closed casket which Señor Romero says he will have sent up at once. Also, as things are after a post-mortem, it will be better that he be buried immediately. Therefore, Doña Mencia and your cousin had better make arrangements for the funeral to-morrow."

Gravely the girl came to Alan and taking his hand looked straight into his steady eyes.

"You are good to me," she said brokenly, the tears glistening on the long black lashes. "I shall never forget."

Then turning, biting her handkerchief to steady the trembling of her lower lip, she passed within the shadows of the señor's room.

Some time later, while finishing the mixing of his solutions, Alan's heart went to his throat as he heard steps coming from the apartment adjoining and the sound of stifled sobs drawing away along the arcade. Then, picking up his instruments and bottles, he passed along the court to attack his gruesome task.

The gray dawn was seeping through the barred windows when Dr. Lethbridge, with a

## *THE WAKE OF THE SETTING SUN*

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sigh of relief, stretched his strained muscles, carefully scrubbed his hands and walked along to the entrance of the great living room.

As he entered, a gray-haired little figure rose quickly from the sofa near the fire.

“Come, señor doctor! Hakamura has your breakfast waiting,” Doña Mencia said. “It is a regret to me that you should have had to wait so long.”

“How is Miss Paloma?” Alan asked anxiously as they continued along to the dining room.

“Quieter, poor child. Her courage has come again and I hope she will drop to sleep.”

At the end of the refectory table Romero was sitting, beginning some rolls and coffee that Hakamura had just brought.

“What results, doctor?” he questioned as, half rising, he shook Alan’s hand.

“Better wait,” the latter cautioned as the Japanese brought in a tray of cold meat and fruit.

The Spaniard nodded understandingly and the two men ate in silence. As they were finishing, the tall doors swung back and Paloma

## *AN UNEXPECTED DIAGNOSIS*

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entered. Her eyes were red and swollen, but her features were composed and her mouth set in a firm line.

“What did you find?” she inquired eagerly.

“You should have tried to sleep,” Alan reproved her gently. “Come, let us sit in the arcade.”

“Before I give you the results of my examination,” the doctor began as, outside the great living room, they pulled their wicker chairs close around him, “will you send Hakamura down to the boatmen who were to take us over this morning and tell them to go to San Diego and tell Captain O’Neil that I shall not return to-day or to-morrow. O’Neil will notify Lawton.”

“But, my friend,” Paloma objected, looking at him wonderingly, “I cannot permit that our trouble——”

“You need me, Miss Paloma,” he interrupted.

“Need you! Why, father is dead,” she murmured uncomprehending. “Tell me? Why do I need you?”

## *THE WAKE OF THE SETTING SUN*

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“You do not understand,” he leaned forward, grave, serious. “I am needed, Miss Paloma, because I am positive that the Señor de la Guerra was murdered.”



## CHAPTER XIII

### A PIECE OF FISHLINE

**A**BOVE the deep green pines girdling Sun Mountain a bunch of clouds hung white like a powder puff. The air was stirring and the syringas near the steps scattered their delicate snowflakes over the walk.

“Then do you think that some one, perhaps Hakamura or the man you heard earlier, struck down the señor and escaped before we arrived?” Romero questioned, first breaking the silence.

“No one struck Don Alvarez,” Alan asserted positively. “There were no marks of blows on his body, no evidence of violence.”

“But, if no one attacked him, how was he killed?” the Spaniard asked.

“He was poisoned,” Alan said quietly.

“Poisoned!” Paloma gripped the arms of her chair, her eyes searching Alan’s face. “But

it is impossible. Why do you think he was poisoned?"

"The heart was enormously dilated and the veins and internal organs frightfully congested. Furthermore, the spinal cord reveals extensive changes in the ganglion cells of the anterior horns. All of which is characteristic of alkaloid toxemia. But, in order to make it certain, I tested the blood and the reaction was positive. I cannot tell what kind of poison was used because I have only a few reagents with me. However, it is unquestionable that some powerful alkaloid has been introduced into the señor's blood."

"But how did it get there?" Romero questioned.

"By hypodermic needle," Alan declared. "On the forearm just above the wrist I found a minute puncture of the epidermis where the point entered. The same poison that was in the blood was fringing this puncture. There is no question but that some one poisoned him by shooting his arm with a hypodermic; either that or the señor committed suicide."

"You mean killed himself?" Doña Mencia

## *A PIECE OF FISHLINE*

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burst out, horrified. "Holy Mary! He was a devout Roman Catholic. Such an idea is impossible."

"I agree with you," Alan nodded thoughtfully. "There was no trace of anything in the stomach sack; therefore, he swallowed none; yet the poison in his blood was very powerful and struck him down almost immediately; and if he had injected the stuff himself, we would have found the hypodermic lying near. But I made a careful search and there is no such instrument in the room; therefore, he did not kill himself."

"Then how was he killed?" Paloma inquired.

"By some one sticking a hypodermic full of some deadly fluid into his wrist while he was asleep. Then, holding him down quiet until the drug got in its work and he sank into a stupor. This was where the plan failed, for your father, when he felt the prick of the needle, awoke and made the struggle that aroused me and caused his assailant to flee. It was this man I heard crashing through the bushes of the court."

"But why resort to such an unusual way of

killing a person as injecting drugs into him with a hypodermic?" Paloma objected. "If any one should have wished father harm, why didn't he kill him in some more ordinary way; or, if he wanted to feed him poison, to slip some in the water? Father's drinking bottle is always on his table and he regularly takes at least half of it every night. It would have been so easy."

"That is true, but the cause of his death would have been discovered if a post-mortem had been performed, for the poison would have manifested itself in the stomach sack. In that case investigation might have led to the guilty party. But suppose the murderer's plan had been successful and he had been able to hold your father down and quiet until the drug put him in a stupor. Then no one would have heard anything and your father would have been found dead in bed this morning. Unless one was already suspicious of poison, as I was from his dying symptoms, that puncture of the needle would have gone quite unnoticed and, as the stomach showed nothing, a physician would almost certainly have pronounced death due to apoplexy. It was a clever attempt to commit



## *A PIECE OF FISHLINE*

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murder in such a way that it would not be evident that murder had been committed. And it would certainly have succeeded if your father had not put up the struggle that awakened me.”

“But the door!” Doña Mencia put in. “It was locked and the key on the night stand.”

“The murderer may have locked the door after him with a duplicate key,” Alan explained.

“Which Hakamura had,” Paloma added.

“That is true,” Alan agreed. “Hakamura could have murdered your father and been locking the door as I caught him. Then, again, he might have been going to the señor’s aid as he says he was. Either explanation is possible.”

“But how account for his denying having a key when he really had one?” Romero reminded him.

“It does look queer,” Alan admitted. “Still, he was greatly excited and a man might under those circumstances put a key in the lock and fail to work it and think he had the wrong key.”

“But he looked guilty,” the Spaniard persisted. “He was frightened green.”

“He is clever enough to see that things looked

## *THE WAKE OF THE SETTING SUN*

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a bit suspicious against him," Alan argued, "and even an innocent man might appear frightened with murder hanging over him; especially a foreigner. Then you say you searched him at once and also his quarters and the ground around the arcade before the señor's room and that you found no sign of a hypodermic. Of course, the shrubbery out there is pretty thick. Are you sure you looked carefully?"

"Quite sure," the Spaniard declared emphatically. "There is nothing hidden there."

"That is in Hakamura's favor," Alan said, "for a hypodermic is nothing one can swallow. Still, it does look as if he might have been implicated in it. But we must not lose sight of the man I heard crashing through the shrubbery and the tall, thin fellow I saw enter the señor's room earlier in the evening. Who was he?"

"Your description of him as a tall, thin man is vague," Romero reminded him. "It would fit the description of our foreman who is very tall and very thin. But it might be many persons. By the way, Paloma, where is Bart?"

## *A PIECE OF FISHLINE*

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“I have sent for him,” the girl answered. “He is out on the range but should be here soon. You can leave him out of the question, however; he is quite reliable and was devoted to father.”

“We should leave no one out of the question, Miss Paloma,” Alan said. “You must remember that we have practically nothing to go on except the Jap, the tall, thin man and your father’s last words: ‘He—he—he’ll.’ Do those words mean anything to any of you? Don Alvarez was certainly trying to name his murderer for he said them when we asked him who killed him. Do you know anybody whose name begins that way?”

“No one I can think of,” Romero answered, stroking his mustache thoughtfully.

“What is Hakamura’s last name?” Alan persisted.

“Hakamura is his last name,” Doña Mencia explained. “I don’t know his other names.”

“And what is the name of this tall, thin foreman?”

“Oh, no,” Paloma gasped. “But it’s impossible.”

“What do you mean?” Alan insisted.

“It’s quite absurd,” she hastened to add.

“I will explain,” Romero interposed. “Our foreman, Bart, is an American. His last name is Gilmore. But you know that in Spanish, *g* before *i* is pronounced like *h*. So Gilmore is pronounced ‘Heelmore.’ And, when Don Alvarez said ‘He-he-he’ll,’ he may have been trying to speak Bart’s name. That is what my cousin means.”

“But it is impossible,” Paloma declared.

“Nothing is impossible,” Alan reminded her. “Those words are important because they are about the only clue we have. That is, except this.” And taking a folded piece of paper from his pocket, he displayed, lying within, a small end of cord, twisted red and white like a barber’s pole.

“What is it?” Romero leaned forward eagerly and lifted the innocent-looking object to examine it closely. “It looks just like an ordinary piece of fishline.”

“It is,” Alan agreed. “Only, what makes it important is that I found it clasped in the death grip of Señor de la Guerra.”



## CHAPTER XIV

B. G.

“**I**T seems just like any other piece of fish-line,” Romero commented, as the little group bent over the insignificant bit of string.

“It is,” Alan assented. “Only it is banded red and white, while ordinary fishline is generally green and yellow. Did you ever see any like it before?”

“Not that I know of,” Romero shook his head thoughtfully. “But what does it mean? How did it get in my uncle’s hand?”

“I don’t know,” Alan admitted.

“Did you find any other clues?”

“No. But I did not search the room carefully. Suppose we go in now and look around.

“Has it occurred to you,” Alan asked as they proceeded to the señor’s room, “that there might be some connection between Don Al-

## *THE WAKE OF THE SETTING SUN*

---

varez' death and the carrying off of Miss Paloma?"

"But what connection?" the old lady asked.

"That I do not know," Alan said thoughtfully. "Have you questioned the servants as to whether they saw any one suspicious around the hacienda last evening?"

"Yes," Doña Mencia answered. "But they say they saw no one."

"Was there any one especial here to see him last week?" Paloma inquired.

"Just his usual visitors. Some of the hands to ask him for help in their troubles and Bart, Bart especially. He was here many times."

"How about this Bart?" Alan questioned as they paused before the door. "Is he a reliable man?"

"As far as I know, absolutely reliable," the old lady answered. "Don Alvarez trusted him implicitly and, lately, he has put into his hands the entire management of the Northern Ranch, the señor merely supervising things."

"You say he is an American? Where did he come from in the States?"

"I know not. Neither did Don Alvarez.

When I reminded him once that we really knew nothing concerning Bart, he merely laughed and repeated to me our old proverb: 'Ask not after a good man's pedigree.' All I know about him is that he was a helper on a cattle boat that was loading here about five years ago. When his work was finished, as we were short of men, he asked a place as a herder. He had not been here a month when his knowledge of sheep attracted the señor's attention and, a year later, Don Alvarez made him his overseer of the sheep. I suppose you would call him a foreman."

"You are sure he has not returned?"

"Quite sure. I sent one of the servants down to the ranch house early this morning and he says he is not there and does not know where he is."

"Well, let us look things over," Alan said, holding open the massive door while the others passed ahead into the spacious apartment.

"You know there is one thing that seems so strange to me," Paloma stopped beside the table in the center of the room. "And that is that there are no papers on this desk. You

## *THE WAKE OF THE SETTING SUN*

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remember as we looked in last night father was poring over several documents of some sort. And it is most probable that they had to do with what was worrying him. But where are they?"

"Is there anywhere he could have put them?" Alan asked.

"Nowhere except in his safe," Doña Mencia replied.

"Safe?" Romero exclaimed. "Where is a safe? I didn't know uncle had a safe."

"Oh, yes! See! You press here and the panel slips down."

"Can you open it?" the Spaniard inquired, bending over the shiny steel disk disclosed to their eyes.

"I don't know the combination. Do you, Paloma?"

"No, but it is in one of father's memorandum books somewhere. We will find it while we are hunting."

For a time they separated, examining each inch of the floor, peering under the bulky four-poster. Suddenly, Alan gave an exclamation and bent eagerly over the rumpled sheets of the great bed.



“May I use these scissors?” he asked, turning to the table desk and picking up a pair of brass shears. “With your permission, señora,” he added, cutting two squares from near the edge of the coverlet. Carrying them over to the light, he studied them attentively.

“Look!” he turned to the others. “See these!” He pointed out some flakes of a glassy substance lying on the snowy linen. On the other square an irregular yellow stain, as big as an orange, streaked the white.

“Smell!” He held the yellow disk under Paloma’s nose. The pungent odor of ripe bananas floated to her nostrils.

“What is it?” She looked at him inquiringly.

“I don’t know, but I will see if I can find out.”

Crossing to the washstand where a small array of bottles and instruments were spread out, he crumpled in a glass the square of linen with the white flakes; then he filled the tumbler with a clear liquid from a small pitcher. Holding it at arm’s length, he added, drop by drop, another liquid from a phial. As the drops fell,

## *THE WAKE OF THE SETTING SUN*

---

a dazzling streak of magenta shot down in radiations from the center. Soon the glass was full of a brilliant carmine. Deftly the doctor repeated the experiment with the yellow-streaked square. The fluid, as the drops fell, stayed white. He faced the group eagerly watching.

“These white flakes on the sheet are poison; probably the same that was in the blood of the señor, although all I can tell with the simple means at my disposal is that both respond to the test for alkaloid poisons. The yellow stain that smells like ripe bananas is not poisonous.”

“But what does it mean?” Romero inquired.

“That the man who was injecting the hypodermic spilled some of the fluid on the sheets.”

“But the yellow stain?”

“I have no idea what that is. It looks like banana juice. But there are no bananas on this island. Anyway, it is nonpoisonous so we need not worry about it.”

“By the way,” Paloma interrupted, “where is father’s gray waistcoat? The memorandum book is in it. I remember seeing it sticking out as it was lying over the back of this chair when we were here this morning.”

“Here is the waistcoat.” Doña Mencia stepped to the high wardrobe and drew out a dark gray garment. Paloma ran her fingers through the pockets.

“That is queer,” she exclaimed. “I know I saw it this morning and now it is gone.”

“Probably it is just mislaid,” Doña Mencia said, “and will make its appearance soon. If not, we will have the safe opened.”

“Still, it is curious,” Paloma persisted. “It was certainly here this morning.”

“Then from now on, Miss Paloma,” Alan suggested, “it will be better to station one of your men to watch this room night and day. With the memorandum book gone, something might be taken.”

Slowly they filed from the room. As Doña Mencia was swinging shut the door, she happened to glance behind its massive oak.

“What is this?” she exclaimed, stooping and holding up an object made like a cut-off cone to cover the forearm halfway to the elbow. Its cordovan leather was heavily chiseled in an intricate design. But what caused the three

## *THE WAKE OF THE SETTING SUN*

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grouped around the little figure to lean forward eagerly were two letters made of silver disks sunk into the shield that formed the central design. These letters were B. G.



## CHAPTER XV

### THE QUARREL IN THE DINING ROOM

OUT over the sun-baked plateau the funeral cortège wound its way, bearing to his last sleep Don Alvarez de la Guerra. At the head swayed the portly figure of Padre Francisco, the filigree of his surplice delicately traced on the purple of his cassock. In rhythm with his measured steps two acolytes swung their censers, leaving a trail of incense floating on the soft breeze. Behind them, supported on a litter of heavy thongs, came the plain black coffin born by six stalwart Grenadians. Their eyes misty, their heads held high, they looked straight ahead, proud in their sorrow at the honor of their task. Two by two the herdsmen followed, their short home-spun jackets opening over the snowy white of their pleated shirts. Knee breeches of the same material bound their heavy wool stockings. Then

came the women, keeping step to the slow chant of the procession. Their corded dresses, their bodices of white lace and the three-cornered linen caps, all suggested memories of the by-gone days of Old Spain. The children of the school flocked in the rear, flanked by four sisters of Santa Maria of Granada in the somber black robes of the order. Subdued with emotion, the deep sonorous tones of the men blended with the vibrant voices of the women and the shriller bell-like notes of the boys and girls.

Leaving the plateau, the long line had skirted the forest of serried pines to where, above the sea wall, a grassy clearing lay flooded in the streaming sunbeams. Beneath simple headstones, gathered around a central block of granite, lay the dead of the de la Guerra family. Out by the rim of the cliff, a pile of dirt scarred the plush green of the sod.

Reverently the group of watchers listened to the words of the venerable priest, extolling the nobility and kindness of their master. Now and again a hysterical sob arose from the crowd. Then the long black box slowly slipped into the ground and shovelfuls of earth hid

## *QUARREL IN THE DINING ROOM*

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from tear-filled eyes the earthly remains of the old señor.

Mute, oppressed by the thought of death that would come to them some day, the groups retraced their steps beside the pines. Halfway across the plateau, the cortège divided, the peasants continuing on along the cliff, the members of the household turning aside to the hacienda.

Luncheon was constrained. Paloma and Doña Mencia, wearied by the heart strain of the burial, ate in silence. From time to time the former raised her eyes to the portrait of her father facing her as if seeking counsel and courage. Romero de la Guerra and Alan conversed in low tones, avoiding the subject filling their minds, speaking distractedly of mountain lion hunting and tuna fishing. Once the Spaniard had inquired if there was any news of Bart who, since the previous day when the wrist guard had been found behind the señor's door, had been constantly in the minds of all.

"It looks bad," Alan had agreed when a herder sent out in search had entered and reported failure. "Evidently, in spite of the

boats being watched, he has managed to get away."

"But why should he have killed father?" Paloma insisted.

"Perhaps the why of it all will appear when we get at those papers in the safe," the doctor suggested. "Has the red memorandum book turned up yet?"

"No!" the girl replied. "It certainly is curious where that book went. If it does not appear by to-morrow morning, I shall have the blacksmith break the lock. Until then there is no danger. Pedro and Anton are taking turns watching over the room."

"Do you think that is necessary?" Doña Mencia asked.

"Certainly," Alan assured her. "With the book containing the combination gone it would be most unwise to leave the safe unguarded."

They were finishing their coffee when Romero, with a muttered exclamation, half rose from his chair, listening. Outside in the arcade the sound of nailed boots rang out, the door was flung open, and a very tall, gaunt figure slouched into the room. For a flash he



## *QUARREL IN THE DINING ROOM*

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stopped stock-still, hesitated, then slowly shuffled forward.

He was above six feet tall and his thick chest and large-boned, angular frame were covered by a network of steel-springed muscles and tightly drawn, sun-browned skin. Awkward, his legs bowed from constant riding, he shoved forward, first one hip and then the other, which gave him an ambling, rolling gait, like a sailor. He was dressed in sheepskin chaps with the fleece outside. His feet were shod in very high-heeled black shoes, backed by heavy spurs that clanked noisily on the stone floor. He carried his head lowered with a sort of apologetic air, darting rapid glances from under his eyelashes, seemingly looking everywhere at once; a habit that might give to a casual observer the impression that the man was either shifty or embarrassed. His disheveled, mud-colored hair had once been parted; but a great lock had broken loose from where it had been plastered and hung down dejectedly over one temple. From time to time he thrust it up in place with the back of his hand. His nose was large, narrow, with a high, arched bridge; his mouth

bulged out from his face in a rounded protuberance. The broad, square-set jaw, the high cheek bones and projecting lower lip gave to his face a look of dogged determination. But what especially drew Alan's attention was that, above his left wrist, he wore a leather sleeve guard, with B. G. stamped in silver dots. The right sleeve guard was gone.

As he hitched across the room, fingering nervously his dust-gray Stetson, Romero took a step forward. But Bart, holding his eyes fixed on Paloma, shuffled towards the table, apparently unconscious of the younger man whose elbow brushed his sleeve. The girl had pushed back her chair and her glance drilled into the foreman's clear gray eyes. Then, with a cry, she advanced to meet him and gripped his scarred, rugged hands.

"Oh! Bart!" she exclaimed earnestly. "I am so glad you have come!"

"I left that morning very early," he began, his voice deep like a church singer's. "I've been in the mountain section ever since and I only heard the news just now down to the village and I come right on up."

## *QUARREL IN THE DINING ROOM*

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“We must have a talk with you,” Romero broke in brusquely. “There are several things we want to know from you.”

“Well,” the foreman drawled, a note of antagonism in his tone, “anything Miss Paloma wants to know she has only to ask.”

“You can speak before this gentleman,” the girl explained as Bart’s look shifted to Alan. “This is Dr. Lethbridge of New York who has been helping us.”

From under the bushy eyebrows the piercing gray eyes contracted and the foreman nodded.

“Did they tell you that Don Alvarez was murdered?” Romero snapped, irritated by the man’s manner.

“Jim said as how it was rumored he was poisoned.”

“Well, where were you the night he was killed?”

The foreman went white for a second; then the blood flushed his cheek warm mahogany. Quickly he turned towards the young Spaniard and half drew back his arm. Then his nails dug into his thumb and he said in a quiet drawl:

“Now just what do you mean by that, Señor

Romero? Let's get this thing straight before either of us makes a mistake. When you ask me to tell what I did the night Señor Alvarez died, do you mean to insinuate that I am suspicioned of having a hand in his killing?"

"I am asking, not answering questions," the Spaniard's eyes flashed. "Now tell us."

"You'll either change your tune or you can go to hell," the foreman's lower jaw was pushed farther forward.

"Bart, please," Paloma interrupted, laying her hand on his sleeve. "You mustn't quarrel."

"Well, what does it all mean then?" the foreman still kept his eyes on the Spaniard. "What is this feller trying to put over on me anyhow?"

"Nothing, Bart, but we want to know if this is your sleeve guard."

As the girl held out the leather cone, the tall figure took it and turned it over in his fingers. Looking down at his right wrist he handed it back without a word.

"Is it yours?" Romero shot at him.

"Where did you find it?" he asked Paloma, ignoring the young man.



## QUARREL IN THE DINING ROOM

“Lying near father’s dead body.”

“Good God! then you think——?”

“I don’t think anything, Bart. I want you to tell us if it is yours.”

“It’s mine, that’s sure,” he admitted. “I must have left it on the table.”

“Then you confess you were with my uncle night before last,” Romero concluded triumphantly. “Tell us why you killed him.”

“If you say I killed Don Alvarez, you lie,” the foreman took a step forward, threateningly.

Like a flash Romero thrust his fingers in his opened waistcoat and something gleamed dully in his hand. With a spring Alan pinioned his arms to his sides. Then, gripping his wrist, he twisted it until the ugly, snub-nosed Colt clattered on the floor.

“Damn you! What do *you* mean by interfering?” the Spaniard muttered in a suppressed tone facing the doctor, his face ashen with rage and pain. “You have stuck your nose into our affairs long enough and I want you to get off this island.”

The clock in the great living room faintly chimed two. The blood had flowed from por-

## *THE WAKE OF THE SETTING SUN*

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tions of Paloma's cheeks, leaving them patched with carmine and white.

"But, Romero, what are you saying?" she gasped, stooping and picking up the revolver. "To insult a man who is my guest. It is intolerable. Either ask Dr. Lethbridge's pardon or leave this house."

Romero's gaze shifted uneasily from the girl to Bart. He was biting his lower lip which kept slipping out from under his upper teeth. Then, with a shrug of his shoulders, he turned to the doctor.

"I ask your pardon, sir," he said evenly. "What will you? We say sometimes things we better not have said."

"Please forgive," Paloma urged, the tears springing to her eyes. "I know my cousin regrets."

"That is all right," Alan reassured her quietly. "Our nerves are all on edge. Let us think no more about it."

"And now that we have cooled down," Paloma shot him a grateful glance, "let us talk the matter over calmly. And, first of all, Bart, why were you in father's room that night?"

## *QUARREL IN THE DINING ROOM*

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“The señor was going over to San Diego in the morning and he wanted to leave with me the money to pay off the men. To-day is pay day.”

“And he gave you the money?”

“Three thousand dollars about. I must have taken off my sleeve guard because it interfered with my writing the receipt.”

“You speak as if father planned a long stay in San Diego,” Paloma remarked. “My cousin, who was to accompany him, says he was only going for the day to buy some wire to fence in Sycamore Cañon.”

“All I know is what he told me,” Bart persisted doggedly. “He told me he had important business in San Diego and would be gone for several days. Anyway, Sycamore Cañon was fenced in last fall.”

“But this is all nonsense,” Romero interrupted angrily. “I ought to know, since I was going with him. We were to be gone for the day and I understood the wire was for Sycamore Cañon.”

“Are you sure, Bart?” Paloma inquired.

“Quite sure, Miss Paloma.”

## *THE WAKE OF THE SETTING SUN*

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“He’s trying to get out of it,” Romero insisted.

“Get out of what?” Bart drawled.

“Of being suspected of my uncle’s murder,” the Spaniard said.

“Say, will you lay off this murder stuff?” the foreman’s voice was steely. “Why should I be suspected of such a thing just because I was with him that night?”

“Because you probably don’t know,” Romero shot at him, “that, when we asked the señor who had struck him down, he said your name.”

“Said my name,” Gilmore murmured, incredulously. “Said I murdered him? Why, is this straight, Miss Paloma? Did your dad say I killed him?”

“When we asked him who his assailant was he said: ‘He—He—He’ll.’ And my cousin, believes he was trying to say your name.”

“Oh! Your cousin thinks so, does he?” the gray eyes shot a piercing look at the Spaniard, whose lip curled slightly as he flicked his cigarette ash on the floor. “Well, I don’t give a damn what he thinks, Miss Paloma. What I want to know is whether you believe it.”



## *QUARREL IN THE DINING ROOM*

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“I don’t know what father meant,” the girl answered thoughtfully. “He was dying and perhaps was unconscious of what he was saying. Stay around the village, Bart; we may want your help later.”

“Surely, you are not going to let him go,” Romero insisted as the tall figure slouched out to the arcade. “He is guilty. You heard him say he had received three thousand dollars from your father. No one knew he had it and he could have kept it just as well as not. That gives us the motive, as the doctor says. Surely you will have him taken.”

“I don’t know what to think,” Paloma said wearily. “Let us talk no more of this now.”

“You are tired,” Alan said sympathetically, “and, as long as the boats are watched, there is no danger of his getting away; so don’t worry.”

“I will try not to,” she said gratefully. “I will return you your property, Romero,” she added, handing the Spaniard his revolver. “Only, you must promise me not to use it. And now, Señor Lethbridge, if you would care to do so, I should be so glad to take you for a

## *THE WAKE OF THE SETTING SUN*

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walk in our forest and show you the giant Sequoias which are so wonderful.”

Romero had jumped to his feet like a horse under the spur. “But, my cousin,” he burst out, “you cannot go. You realize that we must decide what we shall do about your father’s death. This and many other things.”

“To-night, after dinner, I will talk with you,” the girl flashed at him. “You understand, my cousin? That is my wish.”

Romero took a step forward, blocking her way. His lower jawbones worked back and forth under the skin and he kept opening and shutting his hands. Then he stood back.

“Till this evening then, my cousin,” he bowed low. “And to you, Dr. Lethbridge, I wish a pleasant walk. Your servant, señor.”

## CHAPTER XVI

### IN THE SHADOW OF THE GIANTS

**I**N the glare of the mid-day sun, Alan and Paloma moved across the open plateau.

Through the quivering heat streaming from the naked rock things seemed vapory, unreal, as if distorted by the mischievous meddling of a mirage. To the southward the Great Forest stretched away, its rows of spruce and pine pressing in lines of assault up the flanks of the Mountain of the Sun. Under the dull green canopy all was silent, still, shut in from the murmurs of the outside world.

By the banks of a gently flowing stream they made their way; she gazing straight ahead, her thoughts in the far-away land of the troubled future; her companion distraught, subdued by the numbing force of strange emotions. The air was cool, delightful, freshened as it sifted through the rifts in the leafy roof above. Far above their heads the tufted tops were swaying,

## *THE WAKE OF THE SETTING SUN*

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sending to their ears the faint seething of the slender needles. Now and again, a cone falling from a great height thudded dully on the springy ground. For a time they walked in quiet, wrapped in the cloak of their thoughts.

“What is troubling you?” Alan questioned finally, his voice calmer. “Won’t you tell me what it is?”

“My cousin,” Paloma answered, half to herself. “The way he acted, it was intolerable,” she went on, her eyes flashing. “I cannot understand what made him be so rude to you, my guest.”

“He loves you,” Alan said, “and you must not blame him too much because he does not like my coming.”

A soft flush passed across her face. Her eyes followed the slow eddies of the current.

“You know he loves you? You do know it, don’t you?”

Slowly the black lustrous hair nodded.

“Do you love him?” His voice was strained, anxious.

She did not reply. The man had seized a



piece of a boulder and was gripping it with a hold that made his nails blue.

“Tell me!” he burst out, his throat parched.  
“Tell me if you love him.”

Startled by his tone, she turned to him. Then, softly, so softly that he had to lean forward to catch her words:

“I thought I did,” she whispered, shivering slightly as if she had a chill. “But now I know I was mistaken.”

A snap of Alan’s arm and the great stone splashed a jet of water in the quiet pool. For a moment the girl gazed at him, wondering; then a look half-happy, half-serious softened her eyes. For a time they continued in silence, soothed by the ceaseless swirl of the foaming water.

“Has your cousin any brothers or sisters?” Alan asked finally.

“He is the son of my father’s brother, Alonzo,” Paloma replied.

“How did your uncle come to stay on the island when you say that all the children but the eldest son have gone back to Spain to live?”

“My uncle was educated at the Escorial at

## *THE WAKE OF THE SETTING SUN*

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Madrid and my grandfather bought him a commission in the King's Guards. But while on a visit home the summer before he was to join his regiment, he fell in love with the daughter of the pump tender at the Rancho del Sur and married her over at Tía Juana."

"What did your grandfather do?"

"He had old-fashioned ideas about our blood and not only refused to allow either of them to return to the island, but cut off completely Alonzo's allowance."

"What happened then?"

"Uncle took his wife to Los Angeles, where he tried to earn his own living. It was all right until, a few months later, their baby came. Then their money gave out. Alonzo wrote pitiful letters to father, who at once went North to help them. He found them living in one small room in the poor Mexican quarter and brought them all back with him to San Diego. Returning alone to the island, he had a stormy interview with the old señor and finally obtained permission, not only that Alonzo and his family return, but that he be placed in charge of the Southern Ranch."

## *IN THE SHADOW OF THE GIANTS*

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“Did the old gentleman forgive finally?”

“He always refused to see them. He was a man of the ancient régime and believed that a deadly wrong had been done his race in mixing it with Mexican Indian.”

“It must have made it hard for your father.”

“It did and the worst of it was that the woman, Juanita, blamed father for it all, accusing him of poisoning grandfather’s mind.”

“That is always the way,” Alan laughed. “‘Help a relative, make an enemy,’ the Chinese say.”

“Really, I think the woman went insane on the subject,” Paloma went on. “For, one day, when father was down at the ranch, she became so angry that she spat on him and ordered him from the house.”

“She must have been a delicate soul,” Alan commented.

“What could you expect?” the girl shrugged her shoulders. “She was a peon’s daughter and their blood is as revengeful as their brains are stupid.”

“Did your grandfather leave him anything when he died?”

## *THE WAKE OF THE SETTING SUN*

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“Not a centavo. But father realized the unfairness of this and gave him the use of the Rancho del Sur. He would have deeded it to him outright, but for fear that Alonzo might die and the property would then go to Juanita.”

“Is she still alive?”

“She died six months after uncle. They called it heart failure, but I think it was rancor at being dependent on father.”

“And Don Alvarez took care of the boy?”

“Romero was almost twenty at that time and father, who wanted to do right by him, proposed that he take his father’s place as manager of the Southern Ranch. He has done well and, although they say he has been cruel, he has been especially successful in controlling the Mexicans. And while father did not approve of his methods, he has been much pleased with his nephew’s success, as he realized what a bad lot these laborers are. And he has done what I have often urged him to do and in his will left Romero the Rancho del Sur.”

“But that gives your cousin almost half of the island.”

“In size, yes. But the northern lands are



## *IN THE SHADOW OF THE GIANTS*

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the best and then I want him to have a share. It is only right, as father felt that the Rancho del Sur should really have been given to Romero's father."

"Have you known him well?"

"During the years since uncle's death he has come much to our hacienda. Often, on his return from San Diego, he would bring me presents and candy. So that while, as a child, I was not friendly to him, I came to look forward to his visits. On Saturdays he used to ride over early and we would go on long trail trips in the mountains. So that, as he was the only man of our class that I knew, I suppose I ought to have been in love with him. Yet, somehow, I never thought of such things and it was a real surprise when, on the afternoon before I left for New York, he told me he cared. I did not know what to reply. I was fond of him and thought that perhaps this was love. It is hard for a girl to tell, sometimes. So I told him I would give him my answer when I came home again. Since then, he has written me every day; and, homesick as I was, his letters came to be something I looked for each morning. I also

## *THE WAKE OF THE SETTING SUN*

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think that being away from him made me forget some things that grated when he was with me. Perhaps my letters softened and he naturally concluded I was growing to love him. As our proverb says, 'He who is silent, grants.' Anyway his letters became more full of his feeling and I let him write, half happy that he loved me. So that I could not blame him when, in his last letter, he said he was going to ask my father's consent to his suit. Father's death must have prevented this; although, since my return, as you know, I have had no chance to see him. Or, rather, I have avoided giving him a chance, for I dread to tell him I do not care."

"Yet you must," Alan slipped his arm through hers as they walked beside the level lower reaches of the river. "I know how hard it is for you, but it is only fair to him."

"I will tell him to-night," Paloma said decisively. "Yet, my friend, I dread it, how I dread it just the same."

## CHAPTER XVII

### THE RED MEMORANDUM

**A**S they emerged from the Giant Forest and made their way across the plateau to the hacienda, the sun was slowly sinking into the Pacific. Part of its orange disk was already below the curve of the horizon where banks of clouds were piled like a chain of fire-hemmed, snowy peaks. Halfway up the flagstone walk, a deep-toned gong resounded, filling the court with a melody of sweet vibrations. Before the great entrance door, in the cool of the arcade, Doña Mencia and Romero awaited their arrival. The latter was obviously anxious and, as they came up the steps, rose and greeted his cousin with an unconcealed show of petulant relief.

During the evening meal, he was silent, confining his attentions to Doña Mencia and ignoring Dr. Lethbridge. Paloma was nervous, talked continuously, and tried to bring into gen-

## *THE WAKE OF THE SETTING SUN*

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eral conversation the two men, who, like rival moose, kept watching one another furtively. Alan could see that the girl was but half thinking of what she was saying, her mind dwelling on the interview with the man at her left, whose sharp, hawklike eyes kept trying to bore into her brain and glimpse in advance the answer to his hopes. Once, as their looks crossed and his eyes narrowed into a piercing glance, she shivered slightly and asked Hakamura to close the outside door. The mystery of the señor's death was avoided, although it was evident that the suspicion against the foreman she had trusted was causing the keenest anxiety to Paloma.

Grouped around the taboret on the terrace Alan and Doña Mencia conversed in monosyllables. The Spaniard, moody, was stretched out in the long wicker chair by the railing, his cigarette glowing and dying against the curtain of the night. Paloma, distraught, kept gazing straight ahead over the black ocean whose restless stirring floated drowsily to their ears.

Presently Alan pleaded a letter to Lawton. The girl's eyes strove to detain him, seeking



## *THE RED MEMORANDUM*

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to put off the inevitable interview. But he shook his head slightly and, with a flicker of assent, she bade him good night. Doña Mencia also rose and Romero, apparently swept away by an impulse of nervous friendliness at his rival's early departure, cordially gripped his hand and wished him pleasant dreams.

Sprawled back in the chair of his room, his legs wide spread, Alan followed the dancing shadows thrown by the wavering lamp. Up on the high ceiling just outside the bright ring of light a shadowy silhouette seemed to resemble Paloma. He smiled contentedly. He loved her, this Spanish girl, loved her with all his heart and soul. His face softened at the thought. But what would his friends say? What would he himself have said a week ago if some one had told him he would forget all else in the world except two eyes, so beautiful, so——

There! He was a fool. He knew it. But it was nice to be a fool. He chuckled at the thought of the snorts of his New York pals and Lawton's sarcastic reminder of his own previous views on women. Yes, but Lawton was a

## *THE WAKE OF THE SETTING SUN*

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cynical old bachelor anyway. And he had never met Paloma.

Presently the light on the table began to flicker and sputter and a sudden gust of wind blowing through the open window left him in darkness. As he arose to relight the lamp, he heard steps coming along the flagging and two figures passed so near that the sweet perfume of the girl floated vaguely to his nostrils.

“I know we have said all we can to-night,” Paloma was speaking in a suppressed voice. “After all neither of us can think very clearly just now.”

A few steps beyond his door, the steps stopped and he could hear Romero wish her a whispered good night. Then Paloma continued on around the court to her own apartment.

For a time Alan stood in the open window, sucking in the odor of the orange blossoms floating on the gentle breeze. As he began to remove his clothes he looked up quickly, conscious that a figure had repassed the window.

Half rising, he watched the barred opening further along. In a second a shadow stole by, the silhouette of a man standing out dim and

## *THE RED MEMORANDUM*

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indistinct against the faint light of the cloud-veiled moon.

Crossing to his doorway Alan peered along the arcade. No one was in sight, but from the señor's room adjoining came the sound of voices. Presently the door opened and a dim form appeared. By his costume Alan could see he was the Granadian servant whom Paloma had stationed to guard the safe. As the man came out, he turned and respectfully addressed some one within. From the few words he could understand the doctor gathered that the servant was being sent on an errand to the stables, the voice within, that of Romero de la Guerra, assuring him that he would watch the room during his absence.

As the Granadian's clumsy boots clattered down the walk, Alan slipped along the wall and peered through the barred windows of Don Alvarez' apartment. Within, the lamp threw a circle of mellow yellow around the long table desk. By the left wall, dimly visible in the shadow, a figure was bending over the disk of the safe, whose shiny metal gleamed faintly. Suddenly the figure reached in his pocket and,

## *THE WAKE OF THE SETTING SUN*

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taking a step nearer the table, held some object sidewise so it would catch the rays. Quickly Alan smothered the exclamation that rose to his lips. For the glow of the lamp fell soft and warm on a small, red memorandum book.



## CHAPTER XVIII

### THE OWNER OF THE FISHLINE

**B**REATHLESSLY Alan watched. First the man would pore over the book; then turn the combination; then compare the numbers on the disk with some figures in the memorandum. Against the bare cream wall the shadow of his hands loomed huge like some fluttering grotesque insect of the night. Presently a sharp click sounded, the handle turned in his eager grasp and the thick door swung back.

Feverishly Romero threw himself on his knees and pulling out a narrow long drawer tipped it so the light fell full over its contents. On a pile of gold coins lay a long, folded piece of paper. Attached to this with a clip was a small, crumpled letter. Half turning and reaching behind him, Romero shoved the documents on the table. Then he replaced the drawer with

## *THE WAKE OF THE SETTING SUN*

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its golden contents, swung shut the safe, and whirled the combination.

Bent forward, his face against the bars, Alan hesitated. What should he do? Of course the man was one of the dead señor's heirs and probably had the right to examine his papers. But why, after sending the Granadian on an errand, should he choose the middle of the night with Paloma absent? And why had he denied knowledge of the red memorandum book when he had it in his possession? Finally, what were those papers lying on the table that had caused his hand to tremble as he grasped them. Drawing back Alan felt his way noiselessly along the wall and slipped into the room. The Spaniard was absorbed in raising the panel before the safe and, unnoticed, the doctor tiptoed to the table. Grasping the papers, he quickly thrust them in his pocket. At the crumpling sound Romero whirled and, with an oath of surprise, faced him.

"What are you doing in here?" he said in a low suppressed voice.

"I might ask you the same question," Alan replied quietly.

## *THE OWNER OF THE FISHLINE*

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“What business is it of yours?” he snapped. “This is our house and I have a right to do as I see fit.”

“Perhaps Miss Paloma will have something to say about that,” Alan rejoined.

Suddenly, the man glanced at the table.

“Where are they?” he muttered, his throat dry. “You give me those papers.”

“I think they belong to Miss Paloma,” Alan spoke evenly.

“Give me those papers or, by God, I’ll——” With a snarl, the man drew himself together and sprang.

Dropping to one knee, tackling the flying body around the thighs, Alan for a second bent under the terrific impact. Then his shoulder muscles stood out in knots and, as a woodsman swinging an ax, he slammed the struggling form to the floor. The man lay flat on his back, rolling his head from side to side, strangling for breath; while Alan, his teeth parted in a fighting smile, crouched over him. Then his jaw relaxed.

“The fight’s out of him for the moment,” he murmured. “The question is what shall I do with him?” Struck by a sudden thought, he

## *THE WAKE OF THE SETTING SUN*

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knelt beside the writhing figure and searched his pockets. Presently, with an exclamation of relief, he drew from a holster strapped beneath his shirt the sinister-looking Colt he had handled in the dining room. The man on the floor was pushing himself up on one elbow; then arose unsteadily to his knees. He was still badly shaken, but consciousness had come to his jarred senses. All at once, like a streak, he thrust his hand within his open shirt; then slowly pulled it out again.

"You are thorough," he mumbled grimly, slowly rising to his feet. "I congratulate you."

"Really, señor," Alan assured him earnestly, "I am sorry, very sorry, all this has happened. I know there is a mistake somewhere and that you can explain the removing of those papers."

Romero was gnawing his lower lip until the blood showed on his white teeth. He was struggling for control and his temper was fighting him hard. Unsteadily he moved over and rested his hand on the table.

"I suppose you wouldn't believe me." He was still panting slightly. "I suppose you will think I am making up a lie when I tell you that



## *THE OWNER OF THE FISHLINE*

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those documents you have in your pocket concern something in the señor's life that should not be brought to light, something that would bring great sorrow to my cousin if she should learn of it. It was merely to shield her from this sorrow that I concealed my finding of the memorandum so that I could remove the papers before she came upon them. For God's sake, believe me, Dr. Lethbridge, and hand them back to me."

"What you say is doubtless true, señor," Alan hesitated, half convinced of the man's sincerity. "Yet, you must realize that you ask me the impossible. These papers were in Don Alvarez' safe and belong to his daughter. I find you in the middle of the night removing them without her knowledge. Surely I cannot be a party to their concealment, however much sorrow I may bring upon her. I have only one course to follow and that I mean to do."

Romero half sat on the table, staring at the rug. Then he raised his head.

"Are you going to awaken her now?" he questioned. "Surely she needs rest and the

## *THE WAKE OF THE SETTING SUN*

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morning will be time enough to bring her misery.”

“I agree with you,” Alan admitted. “I have no intention of disturbing her with this matter until after breakfast to-morrow.”

“That is best,” Romero straightened up and took a step towards the door. “And now will you kindly return to me my revolver which I can see is in your pocket. Surely you do not suspect that I would kill you. We are not bandits whatever you may think of us.”

Alan hesitated, fingering the weapon, then he let it slip again into his pocket.

“If you don’t mind, I’ll keep it,” he said.

The lamplight hit Romero square and his eyes gleamed dully. Quickly Alan stepped back, awaiting an attack. But something in the Spaniard seemed to cave in, he gave a nervous laugh with a queer ring in it, and deliberately thrust his right hand into the side pocket of his coat.

Alan stood watching him, every muscle drawn taut. He could see the man’s fingers beneath the cloth opening and shutting as if fighting for control. Suddenly, he staggered and, as Alan

## *THE OWNER OF THE FISHLINE*

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sprang to his assistance, he pitched forward into his arms.

For a second Romero gripped the doctor's wrist and steadied himself as he swayed back and forth. Then, recovering, he drew himself to his full height.

"You shook me up pretty badly." He gave a short mirthless laugh.

"I am sorry all this has happened," Alan apologized. "Really, I do not wish to interfere."

"It is all right," Romero replied in a more friendly tone. "I too regret the unpleasantness. And I realize, Dr. Lethbridge, that you have acted rightly in insisting on showing the papers to my cousin. Good night, señor, till to-morrow at breakfast." And, bowing ceremoniously, the Spaniard passed out into the arcade.

Across the threshold he stopped and waited for the servant coming up the walk. Evidently the man's mission to the stables had been unsuccessful for his voice was apologetic as he addressed his master. Romero apparently reassured him and, as the former's footsteps died

## *THE WAKE OF THE SETTING SUN*

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away along the arcade, the Granadian entered. Nodding a greeting Alan sauntered over by the window. Against the screen the June bugs were beating with a musical whirring of their invisible wings. Out to sea a gull was calling shrilly. With a shake of his head Alan turned towards the door. As he passed the table his foot stepped on some object on the floor and his ankle turned with a wrench that caused him to utter an ejaculation of pain. Stooping, he picked up a brier pipe. Evidently it belonged to the man who had just gone out and had probably dropped from his pocket during the struggle. Certainly it had not been on the floor when they had searched the apartment. Hurrying out to the arcade Alan continued to Romero's door. As he passed the Spaniard's window, through which a shaft of light cut the blackness of the court, he glanced casually again at the object in his hand. With a start he brought up short, turned, and, entering his own room, lit the lamp. Bringing the small red bowl close to the warm rays he examined it. It was just an ordinary pipe, of a shape known as a "bulldog," like thousands for sale at every cigar



## *THE OWNER OF THE FISHLINE*

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store. Where the stem fitted into the bowl, however, the wood had cracked and its owner had bound it with ten or twelve windings of fine silk cord. But what made Alan's hand tremble slightly was that this cord was the same red and white fishline that he had found clutched in the death-stiffened grasp of the old señor.

## CHAPTER XIX

### THE ATTACK IN THE DARK

**W**ITH a shake of his head Alan carefully drew together the long curtains so as to shut off from a person without any view of the room. A breeze coming through the open windows flapped the heavy brocade against the thick bars. Crossing to the door he hesitated. Then, with a shrug of his shoulders, he shot the bolt. It seemed absurd, yet, after all, the Spaniard's anger had died with suspicious suddenness and it was better to take no chances. The psychology of these people was different and even if he had no revolver the man might make an attack on him, especially if, as seemed likely, he had been concerned in the señor's death. Fortunately he was warned and armed and it was up to him. As he crossed to the bed, he smiled grimly. Here he was on his vacation, bar-

## *THE ATTACK IN THE DARK*

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ricaded in a room, with the prospect of sudden death before twenty-four hours had gone.

Removing the automatic from his pocket, he broke it and examined the chambers. It was loaded and he stiffened at the thought that one of those dirty pieces of lead might be lodged somewhere in his body. Snapping the gun shut he deliberately laid it on the night stand. As he stooped and the light of the lamp fell on his sleeve, he gave a start and bent forward. On his right wrist, extending up to the base of the little finger, four streaks of some curious chrome yellow caught his eye. Bending closer, the pungent odor of ripe bananas rose to his nostrils. Hurrying to the desk, he brought back under the lamp the square of linen cut from the sheet of the dead señor.

“It’s the same stuff,” he muttered. “How did it get on my hands?”

Crossing the room, he examined the washstand. The basin and the pitcher were empty. The servant had evidently neglected to fill the latter after Alan’s efforts before dinner to remove some traces of sulphuric acid used in the post-mortem. The soiled towel showed, how-

## *THE WAKE OF THE SETTING SUN*

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ever, no marks. As he reached for the bell cord by his bed, his glance rested on his watch.

“It’s past midnight,” he murmured to himself. “Anyway, it was the white flakes that were poisonous. Only, how did those marks get on my hands?”

Removing his shoes, he threw himself on the outside of the bed. Propped against the pillow, he stared thoughtfully at the high, bare wall opposite. The oil was running low and the light flickered, casting bobbing shadows on the somber background. His brain was in a whirl, going over the events of the day. Slowly, his body slipped until his feet pressed against the heavy mahogany baseboard, while his head bent forward and his hand hung limp by his side. Presently the lamp sputtered and went out. Through the cracks of the drawn curtains a faint glimmer of starlight filtered in. From away over the Great Forest the weird call of a loon rose above the muffled pounding of the surf.

On the lips of the dozing man a smile played. He rolled his head back and forth on the pillow; then turned on his right side. To his



## *THE ATTACK IN THE DARK*

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dreaming ears came the sound of her voice, sweet and low like an old 'cello, harmonizing with the soft whistling floating in through the chinks of the stirring curtains.

With a start Alan awoke. Somewhere out in the night a call for help rang out, the agonized cry of a woman. Struggling to his elbow, he listened, every nerve quivering. A heavy body went crashing through the shrubbery and there came the sound of steps, running. As he hitched himself up on both elbows, a hand parted the long curtains over the window and the faint glimmer from the court lit up the gleaming tube of a flash. Slowly the disk of light crawled across the floor until it reached the four-poster, then up over the chintz flounces until its rays struck him full. Blinded for a second Alan lay still, blinking. Then, like a stag at night, he gazed fascinated as, beside the silver tube, was thrust the ugly round muzzle of a stubby black revolver. Paralyzed, unable to move a limb, his fingers alone kept gripping and twisting the coverlet. As his mouth opened wide there came a roaring crash, a splinter pricked his wrist and the acrid smell of pow-

## *THE WAKE OF THE SETTING SUN*

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der filled the room. A second flash of flame streaked the darkness; he bounded from the bed and flattened himself against the wall a few feet from the window. Clutching at the plaster, he reeled back, dizzy, gasping. For, through the opening in the curtains he had seen pressed against the heavy bars the face of Paloma de la Guerra.

## CHAPTER XX

### GONE

WITH an effort Alan steadied himself and glanced towards the window.

The flash was still darting over the floor, seeking him out. Some one outside was calling his name. Stiffening back, he groped his way along the wall and cautiously pushed back the huge bolt. Then, flinging wide the heavy door, he bounded across the arcade, hurdled the low railing and crashed into the shrubbery beneath. Recovering his balance he was plowing blindly through the bushes when a stake knocked him spinning, full length. Grunting for breath, he staggered to his feet. Footsteps were running down the walk and a woman's voice kept frantically shouting his name. As he lurched forward, dizzy, reeling, a hand seized him.

“It's all right,” Paloma called in his ear.  
“You understand, Alan? It's all right.”

Turning, he clutched her wrists and held her off. "Why did you do it?" he muttered hoarsely.

The girl tried to pull away, a shadow flitting across her face. Then, with a hysterical little sob, she relaxed her hold.

"Holy Mary!—you thought that?" she whispered. "You do not understand, my Alan. Come with me!"

He hesitated, holding her back. Then, still gripping her wrists, he let her lead him doubtfully wondering, up the steps to the arcade. The still lighted flash lay beneath his window, its soft rays leaking out along the flagstones. A few feet beyond, the dull satiny outline of the revolver showed. Tearing one hand from his grasp the girl stooped, picked up the light and shoved the silver tube between the bars.

"Look!" she urged.

Through the parted curtains he could see the round yellow disk flitting across the floor and up over the high sides of the bed. The depression was still there where, but a moment before, his head and shoulders had sunk into the pillow. Just below, the brown oak sideboards



were splintered with the impact of a bullet. As the bright circle again slipped down the chintz flounces and stopped on the floor beneath, Alan drew in his breath and pressed his face against the bars.

“Good God!” he gasped. “What is it?”

On the matting something was lying, the oozing carcass of a lizard. Cigar shaped, about two feet long, its body was sunk down squat between the joints of its stubby legs. The skin, banded in yellow and black, was covered with pimply bumps as if some loathsome disease were rotting it away. From a gaping hole in its sides the intestines were seeping, covering the matting with a reddish, purplish stain. The head was flat and blunt as a mud turtle, the eyes like glassy shoe buttons; while through the froth-fringed mouth showed rows of needled teeth.

“Isn’t it a Gila?” Alan’s voice was dry, his gaze glued on the gruesome mass.

“We pronounce it ‘heela,’ ” the girl replied. He could feel her trembling slightly. “How did you recognize it?”

“I specialized in toxicology in medical school.

Reptile poisons were a part. We had a pair of those brutes for experimental work.”

“Then you know they are dangerous?”

“Their bite is absolutely fatal. Was this one attacking me?”

“Its teeth were but a few inches from you when I fired.”

“Then you—” he raised her hand to his lips. “Thank you, Paloma,” he said simply. “I didn’t understand.”

“You were close to death,” she murmured, “so very close.” And she pressed his arm convulsively against her heart.

Along the court a door slammed and Doña Mencia and Hakamura, awakened by the shots, came hurrying around the arcade.

“What has happened, Paloma?” she inquired anxiously as, huddled in a cloak slipped over her night clothes, she came up to them.

“Dr. Lethbridge has had a close call,” the girl explained. “I shot a Gila in his room just as it was climbing over the flounces of his bed to attack him as he slept.”

“Holy Virgin, I am so glad, doctor,” the old lady exclaimed earnestly, taking Alan’s hand

in both of her own. "But, Paloma," she turned to the girl, "tell me how——"

"Just a minute, dear," Paloma drew the cloak more closely around her aunt's frail shoulders.

"Hakamura," she turned to the diminutive Oriental. "Something very serious has happened and I want Mr. Gilmore at the hacienda right away. Go down to his quarters and ask him to present himself here at once. You understand—at once!"

As the Japanese ran down the steps, she turned to the older woman and slipped her arm through hers.

"You will take your death out here," she insisted. "Come to my room, and, while I am dressing, I will tell you all about what has happened; then you must sleep again. And, doctor," she called back as the two women drew away along the arcade. "Please wait for me. Our foreman will be up soon and I should wish the favor of your counsel. And, while I think you are safe for the moment, please stay in the darkness here and be watchful."

Stretching himself out on the bench by the

railing, Alan puffed meditatively on his brier. Heela! Like a flash the thought of Don Alvarez' last words, "He—he—he'll," crossed his mind. Gila—heela, Paloma had just pronounced the word. Evidently the dying man was merely trying to say that a Gila monster had carried death to him. Alan nodded thoughtfully. It was all clear now. The poison in the blood, the prick on his wrist like a hypodermic puncture. After biting the señor, the reptile had probably slipped out unnoticed and had been lurking in the undergrowth until impelled to attack him. It was all so simple. The mystery was solved. How fortunate that his suspicions against Romero had not been voiced. But where was the Spaniard? Surely the shots must have awakened him. He rose quickly as the flash came hurriedly along the arcade and Paloma, fully dressed, stood before him.

"Thank God!" she burst out, in a relieved tone. "Really, I should not have left you even for a minute."

"You are overstrung," Alan reassured her. "There is no danger now."



“You do not comprehend,” she returned, serious.

“But I do!” he protested. “That reptile got in your father’s room just as it did in mine and——”

“Pardon, my friend,” she interrupted. “But you do not know that the Gila has his home only in the desert of the Southwest. There are none on Corona del Mar.”

“But there must be, else how did one get into my room?”

“It did not get there, it was put there.”

“But are you sure?”

“Come!” She walked over to the door and threw once again the circlet of light on the oozing mass on the floor.

“Look more carefully!” she urged. “Gilas do not come into this world with fifteen feet of red and white fishline tied to each hind leg.”

“Good God!” The man’s voice died away like the creak of a rusty hinge.

“Notice that the lines trail away over there to the window where some one held them through the bars ready to draw the creature back once the thing was done.”

## *THE WAKE OF THE SETTING SUN*

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“That explains the lack of any trace of how your father met his death,” Alan mused.

“Yes,” Paloma agreed. “And when the poison began working, it acted so quickly that he evidently was only able to call out before he began writhing on the floor.”

“But did you see who it was holding those lines when you came up to my window? And how did you——”

“Let us go to the living room!” Paloma interrupted. “And while we are waiting for Bart, I will tell you what happened.”

“But your cousin?”

She looked at him for a moment, a curious expression in her eyes.

“His room is empty,” she said finally. “He is gone.”

## CHAPTER XXI

### BAD BLOOD

**W**ITHIN the lofty apartment the fire was still glowing in the great fireplace. Lighting the tall iron lamp, Paloma took an ancient brass bellows and vigorously fanned the embers to a flame. Presently a crackling fire was roaring up the chimney. Settling back into a corner of the sofa, the girl tucked her feet up and motioned to a place beside her.

“I pray you, smoke your pipe!” she urged, the dancing reflection playing on the glossy sheen of her hair.

Alan packed down the tobacco in the bowl and puffed it vigorously into flame.

“Come, tell me!” he said.

“When I left Romero,” Paloma began, “I went directly to my room and sleep came soon. But, in the night, I awoke and red lights went darting before my eyes and I kept going over

## *THE WAKE OF THE SETTING SUN*

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and over the happenings of the day; father's death, the suspicions against Bart and my talk with my cousin. It must have been about two in the morning when I heard a soft, curious whistle as if coming from far away. I would have thought nothing about it, for sometimes the call of the gulls at night is weird and much like it. But all at once there hit my mind what you had said about the strange whistle on the night father was killed.

“I tried to smother my worry, telling myself that I was a stupid, foolish one and that I must get some sleep. But somehow the dread kept gripping me until, at last, it grew so strong that I sprang from my bed, threw around me my kimono and moved over to my doorway. By the light of the lantern over the entrance I could see leaning against the grating of your window a black mass like a long sack of potatoes. Stepping inside I picked up my revolver and flash, hurried out into the arcade and, keeping close, slipped along the wall. At the corner I could see that the mass was a man. His face was pressed against the bars, his left hand fumbling with the grating. Now and then he



## *BAD BLOOD*

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gave a low, soft whistle. Suddenly something gleamed in his right hand and, under the strain, I thought he had a revolver and was going to shoot you. I was terrified and called out for help. My cry startled him and, springing backwards, he vaulted the railing as you yourself did. Then I could hear him tearing through the shrubbery and making off across the court. I ran along the arcade to follow him. As I passed, I happened to glance at your window. The rays from the porch lamp struck it full and what I saw made me stop short. An end of red and white fishline was hanging from the lowest bar. But what made me doubly startled was that it kept moving, slowly rising up over the iron. The true meaning struck me too late and I grabbed as the ends slid from the bar and tumbled to the floor inside. Springing forward I shoved my flash through the grating, pushed aside the drawn curtains and looked in."

Paloma paused, closed her eyes and shuddered.

"It was dreadful!" she continued at length. "That beast had crossed the floor and, like a cripple, was hunching its ugly body over the

## *THE WAKE OF THE SETTING SUN*

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side boards of the bed. With a last clumsy lurch it had reached the level surface and was waddling towards your hand when I stuck my revolver through the bars, prayed to our God to carry my bullet true, and fired."

Alan took the girl's hand in both his own and looked her full in the eyes.

"It was splendid, Paloma," he said earnestly, "and I owe my life to you. For, along with the cobra and certain East Indian adders, the Gila is the most dangerous creature on earth. Now that I know what killed your father, I realize that I should have suspected the nature of those white disks we found on his sheet. They were the drops of saliva which fringe the jaws and are deadly poison. But I never suspected any animal poison because there was no trace of any animal and the puncture in the artery of the wrist was like a hypodermic. And the symptoms your father showed, the disintegration of the ganglion cells of the spinal cord and the tremendous dilation of the heart and veins, are symptomatic of any alkaloid."

There were tears in the girl's eyes as she glanced up at her companion.

## *BAD BLOOD*

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“Our Holy Mary was good to us,” she said simply. “Only, my friend, what if I hadn’t come in time?”

“Would you have cared?” Alan’s eyes earnest, serious, sought her own. “Tell me! Would you really have cared?”

As she turned to face him she suddenly gripped the arm of the sofa and rose to her feet. For a flutter of her eyelids she stood erect, rigid, waves of blood sweeping across her face like breath on a cold mirror. Then she took a step towards the tall, gaunt figure who, twirling his hat in silent embarrassment, was standing in the doorway.

“Come in, Bart,” she said quietly. “Sit here with Dr. Lethbridge and myself. Many things have come to us and we must talk of what is best for us to do.”

Sunk back in the center of the long sofa, the soft glow of the fire lighting his keen, bronzed features, the foreman listened closely to all that had occurred at the hacienda. For some time after Paloma had finished he was silent, his piercing eyes thoughtfully following the play of the flame phantoms dancing on the lofty

## *THE WAKE OF THE SETTING SUN*

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walls. At length he rose, bent down to the hearth and knocked the ashes from his pipe. Then, straightening, he backed his powerful shoulders against the shelf of the fireplace and faced the man and girl on the sofa.

“You nearly got yours, doctor,” he said gravely. “Thank God, he didn’t kill you.”

“You think,” Paloma began, “that the man who attacked Dr. Lethbridge——”

“Was the same that killed your dad,” he concluded.

“It was——” she paused abruptly.

He fixed her with his sharp eyes, then nodded.

“I reckon you got it doped straight, Miss Paloma,” he said. “But the thing that I can’t figure out nowise is why he wanted to do it. As far as the doctor comes in, of course it’s jealousy and a bird like that sees red when he’s stirred up. But, as for the señor, why, he treated him like a son.”

“Perhaps I can throw some light on that phase of it,” Alan said, and he related at length his finding of Romero in the señor’s room earlier in the evening.

“There is something in those papers that



## *BAD BLOOD*

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makes it desperately important for your cousin to get hold of them," he concluded. "Here they are. See what they show."

Paloma drew near the lamp and examined the long, folded piece of foolscap with the crumpled, dirty letter attached. As she unclipped the latter and began to scan its pages, her hand trembled and her bosom rose and fell.

"Holy Virgin, it is clear now," she murmured, handing him the rumpled piece of paper. "Read it, it is not easy for me to explain."

"But it is in Spanish." Alan handed it back. "You must read it."

"Just a minute. I want to see what this is," she said, her eyes running down the long sheet of foolscap. "All right," she added, taking the letter. "I will translate both for you. The letter is dated Tía Juana, Mexico, and was written last Monday week, that is, about ten days ago. It is addressed to father and begins as follows:

"Honored Señor,

"Do you remember Gutierrez' little girl who years ago used to hold your horse when you stopped by the Santa Cruz spring near the

## *THE WAKE OF THE SETTING SUN*

---

Rancho del Sur? Since father died, I have been living here in Tía Juana because Romero wished to avoid any talk until we were married. But, yesterday, he came to me and told me it was not to be, as he was engaged to Señorita Paloma. Perhaps you can guess what he means to me and what claim I have on him. He is gone from my life now; that I know. And, without him, señor, there is, God forgive me, only one thing I can do.

“But, since I was a little girl, I have loved my señorita and I do not wish to go away without trying to keep her from what has come to me. I do not write this in hatred or revenge. I still love him and shall keep his secret and mine from all in this world but you.

“Pray for me, señor.

“Your unhappy,

“JUANITA PALOS.”

“Good God! Did she kill herself?” Bart burst out.

“Poor child,” Paloma said tenderly. “Nina told me yesterday that her body was brought over last Friday and buried by some relatives of hers at the Rancho del Sur. Nina also said that father was present at the burial, which surprised me. That is probably what upset him so last Friday as my aunt noticed. You are

## *BAD BLOOD*

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aware what pride he had in the family honor and he would have felt the responsibility as resting on his blood."

"But that dirty dog hasn't a drop of real de la Guerra blood in his veins," Bart muttered. "He's Mexican, and rotten Mexican at that."

"Did any one suspect anything?" Alan inquired.

"Evidently not, for Nina would have heard and she said nothing to me. But you can understand how my father would have felt and why he decided on what he had made up his mind to do in San Diego."

"What is that?" Alan questioned.

"His plan is shown in this paper." Paloma pointed to the long sheet of foolscap lying on the table. "It is a draft of a new will and in it father does not mention Romero, except to grant him a small pension on the express provision that he sign an agreement never again to set foot on Corona del Mar. By the will now lying in father's vault in San Diego he receives the Rancho del Sur. Father was going over to San Diego to get his lawyer, a Mexican notary,

## *THE WAKE OF THE SETTING SUN*

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to draw up this new will and destroy the other, thereby disinheriting Romero."

"Would to God he had done it," the foreman growled. "Still it won't do him much good when a rope gets squeezing that neck of his."

"Of course, the whole affair is clear now," Alan said. "When the señor received Juanita's letter last Wednesday, he sent for Romero and told him that he could not marry Miss Paloma and that he was going to cut him off in his will. He also told him that, on the following Wednesday, he wanted him to accompany him to San Diego where his lawyer would draw up a paper for him to sign, by which, in return for a certain monthly allowance, he was to agree never again to set foot on Corona del Mar.

"Evidently the señor, from family pride, did not wish the reasons for his nephew's leaving known and both agreed not to speak of it to Doña Mencia and to make some excuse for the trip and later for his failure to return. It was then that Romero suddenly realized that, if Don Alvarez failed to reach San Diego alive, the old will, by which he inherited the Rancho del Sur, was still valid. So he planned to kill him the



## *BAD BLOOD*

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night before he left. And he also realized that, if he could get rid of him in some way that would not cause suspicion to fall on him, he, as his heir, could get hold of the señor's papers and destroy any evidence against himself; in which case no one would be the wiser, for even the members of the household like Doña Mencia had no suspicion that the relations between Señor de la Guerra and his nephew were not of the friendliest.

“It was then that the idea of the Gila occurred to him as a means of making way with his uncle, not only without drawing suspicion on himself but without leading any one to believe that murder had been committed. For, without such a suspicion in his mind, any doctor who viewed the body after death would never have noticed the puncture on the wrist and would promptly have said ‘apoplexy.’ Especially as Romero had that fishline on the animal's legs with which to draw it back and leave no trace.

“Everything was all set then for Tuesday, the night before the señor and Romero were to leave for San Diego. This was the best night

## *THE WAKE OF THE SETTING SUN*

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because Romero would naturally be staying at this end of the island so as to get an early start next day and his presence would excite no suspicion. But late Saturday evening, he happened to go down to the boat and Captain Tanner handed him your letter and telegram. Sensing their contents, he opened them and learned that you were to arrive in San Diego Sunday afternoon and would be over here late that night. He realized that he was in a predicament. It was too late for him to ride down to the Rancho del Sur and get the Gila that evening. Yet you would have seen your father before the following night and, if anything happened to the señor, you would at once suspect Romero. Since he didn't dare risk any other way of killing your father, there was only one thing to do and that was to prevent your arrival."

"You got it doped right, doctor," Bart nodded thoughtfully. "I remember him talking to two fellers out on the pier just as the *Acapulco* was pulling out. It was falling dark but it was them two Mexicans all right. He

## *BAD BLOOD*

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rode on home afterwards. I recollect seeing him heading south."

"Later, he would probably have staged a pretended rescue," Paloma added. "Heaven knows I would have been grateful to him, especially with my father dead of apoplexy, as they would have called it."

"Next time I saw him was coming from the hacienda early Tuesday morning," Bart said thoughtfully. "He had probably brought up the Gila and hid it."

"And then he saw our boat," Alan concluded. "At first he must have thought all his plans were blocked. But he at once found out that you did not suspect him of having any hand in carrying you off. And when Doña Mencia proposed that you wait until the next day before worrying your father about it, Romero jumped at the chance that my own presence might prevent the señor from telling you anything before he retired."

"And that's just what happened," Bart said sadly.

"But where did he get the Gila?" Paloma asked.

## *THE WAKE OF THE SETTING SUN*

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“Probably over in Arizona,” Bart answered. “He was hunting over there last summer.”

“But how do you suppose he got the idea to use the animal?”

“You must remember, Miss Paloma, that his mother was a Mexican woman and using Gilas to get rid of folks they hate is old stuff with the Mexicans. I seen it worked once on a peon in my section gang when I was on construction down in Sinaloa province. One greaser had struck another and the man managed to smear the peon’s blankets with a paste of lizards’ eggs of some sort and then turned the Gila in the tent as he slept. The beast feeds on these eggs and likes ’em better than the devil loves a sinner and will make for ’em a mile off. The peon rolled on the Gila as he was trying to suck some of the stuff from the blanket and the reptile promptly bit him. He died in half an hour.”

“That accounts for the yellow stains on Señor Alvarez’ bed clothes,” Alan concluded.

“Surest thing you know,” Bart nodded. “And, as for you, he probably had a tin of this egg paste in his pocket and managed to rub some on his palm. Then, when he had his



## *BAD BLOOD*

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scrap with you, he pretended to be falling and grabbed your wrist and smeared you with it without your noticing.”

“But you would have thought that the reptile would have bitten him,” Alan remarked.

“Not if he wore gloves,” Bart answered positively.

“But did you not hear anything just before father cried out?” Paloma urged. “Surely he must have made some noise.”

“I did not hear a sound except a sort of queer whistling, soft and far away.”

“That was Romero exciting the critter,” Bart said. “And, when he heard you jump out of bed, he jerked him back and skipped. But evidently the señor had grabbed the beast when it attacked him and gripped hold the fish cord. Then, as your cousin pulled, the line on one foot broke and he pulled him back by the other, clapped him in his box and sprang into the shrubbery.”

“But how could he escape without being noticed? And what did he do with the Gila?”

“He just hid the brute’s box in those thick bamboos below the steps and then crawled back

## *THE WAKE OF THE SETTING SUN*

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unnoticed to his room. The doctor and Hakamura took a long time trying to break in and that left Romero heaps of time to get into bed and pretend to be asleep."

"But why wasn't the Gila's box found?" the girl objected. "The underbrush was searched."

"Yes, but who did the looking?" Alan reminded her.

"You're right," she nodded her head thoughtfully. "Romero did the searching and assured us that there was nothing there. He probably used that opportunity to push the box further into those bamboos where no one would ever see it and where he had the animal at hand when he attempted to kill Dr. Lethbridge."

"Well, what are we doing to do?" Alan questioned.

"Go and get him," the girl flashed, her teeth set firm. "Nothing falls into the mouth of a sleeping fox."

The foreman shook his head grimly. "He has a mean bunch of cutthroats at the Rancho del Sur who will follow him anywhere," he said dubiously. "And our Granadians ain't much in the fightin' game."

## *BAD BLOOD*

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“You’re right, Bart.” Paloma rose. “But we’ll fight them just the same. You stay here and I will go round to the kitchen and get some coffee and bread. Then we will talk out what we had best do. I will be back in a few minutes.”

## CHAPTER XXII

### THE CUFF ON THE FLAGSTONES

THE dirt-gray dawn came seeping in through the tall windows. Up the sea wall rose the faint, rusty squawking of the gulls, fighting over their early morning meal. Alan and his companion smoked in silence, staring into the great fireplace, absorbed in thoughts of the night just past and in plans for the coming day. Once the foreman bent down into the hearth and stirred to life the dying embers, then stood over the flame, welcome in the chilling fog of early morning. Ten minutes passed, fifteen minutes; Alan glanced uneasily at his watch. Suddenly both men, moved by the same impulse, started to their feet and made for the entrance door.

“It’s all right! There’s a light in her room,” Alan exclaimed in a relieved tone as they hurried around the court. “For a moment, though, I was uneasy at her delay.”



## *THE CUFF ON THE FLAGSTONES*

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A knock at the window and the calling of the girl's name brought no response from within.

"See! There's a light in the kitchen," Bart called back, as he vaulted the railing and ran across the court to the opposite wing. On the massive oaken table a lamp was sputtering in the draught from the open door. On the farther wall a tall clock ticked methodically amidst the shining rows of pots and kettles. But the great dingy room was still and deserted. Paloma had disappeared.

Just inside the threshold Alan stooped and his face went clay green. On the well-worn flagstones lay a small black cuff of native lace, a part of the blouse the girl had just been wearing.

"By God, doctor, he's got her!" the foreman swore. "What fools we were to leave her out of our sight!"

"Do you think—" Alan began.

"Have you a gun?" Bart cut him short, the drawl gone from his voice.

Alan threw open his coat and showed Romero's automatic slung across his chest.

"Good!" Bart snapped out. "Now hurry,

## *THE WAKE OF THE SETTING SUN*

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man, for once he gets to the Rancho del Sur it's all off."

At the hitching post the foreman stopped short.

"I might have guessed it," he muttered. "That dirty skunk has swiped my horse."

He stood there an instant peering out across the plateau, his narrowed eyes striving to pierce the dripping veil of fog. Then, with Alan at his heels, he ran along the steep road that dropped down a hundred yards to the low-lying stone stables of the hacienda. On the nail-studded door of the main building Bart beat with both fists. Presently, a sleepy cattleman stuck his head from the window above.

"What the hell?" he began. Then, with an oath of surprise, drew back and his bare feet sounded thumping down the stairs. A rattle of chains, the great doors rolled into the walls and Jim, in a flannel night shirt, stood blinking in the opening.

"Quick! Saddle Pinto!" Bart ordered, as he shot past the half-dazed cowboy and plunged down the row of dimly lighted stalls. Jim, blubbering questions, followed and Alan could hear

## *THE CUFF ON THE FLAGSTONES*

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him cursing violently as a sliver stuck in his bare toe. Soon the foreman reappeared, leading Capitan, Don Alvarez' favorite. His companion was having trouble with Pinto, who, excited by the unaccustomed call, sidled and pranced. Skillfully the men worked, straining and panting while they drew tight the cinches of the heavy saddles.

Finally Bart, gathering up the reins, gave one spring and landed on the back of the great black stallion. As the horse, excited, bolted for the door, he roughly drew him on his haunches and leaned towards Jim.

"Tell Doña Mencia," he ordered, "that Romero has kidnaped Miss Paloma and is making for the Rancho del Sur. Say the doctor and I are trailing him. If we don't catch him before he reaches home, we will have to come back for help. So get the men in off the range, arm 'em and send 'em down to the main corral. We've probably got to fight them greasers and we want to be ready."

Wheeling, he gave Capitan his head and shot through the stable door. Swinging into his saddle, Alan dashed across the yard in full pur-

## *THE WAKE OF THE SETTING SUN*

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suit. At the top of the rise by the hitching post Bart reined in and, slipping the bridle through his arm, quickly dismounted. Stopping, his keen eyes carefully studied the ground, soft from the shower of the evening before. Moving to the right and left like a dog on the scent, he finally gave a grunt, vaulted on Capitán and started across the plateau on the road to the Great Forest.

“I’ve picked it up, doctor,” he called out as they galloped side by side. “He’s taken the forest trail skirting the mountains instead of the direct road by the village. We’ve got a chance to overhaul him. Come on!”



## CHAPTER XXIII

### THE END OF A BLIND TRAIL

**T**HE sun had risen in the east, dissolving the fog into a light mist that a sea breeze blew in wisps across the plateau. Beneath the dome of pines on the edge of the forest Bart again swung to the ground. Bending over the soft dirt, he pointed to what looked to Alan like a meaningless jumble of hoof marks.

“It’s as plain as daylight,” he declared in a tone of satisfaction. “See them tracks heavier sunk than the rest? Notice how the off front foot is different from the other? That’s my horse, Chubby. She cast her shoe on me coming up from the village to-night. He’s taken this back trail for fear of meeting some of our herders on the straight road across the range.”

“Do you think we can overhaul him?” Alan questioned anxiously, as they plunged deep into the forest.

## *THE WAKE OF THE SETTING SUN*

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“He has a half-hour start and as fine a horse as ever was,” Bart replied. “But Chubby is carrying double and that’s some handicap. We’ve got a fighting chance, doctor, and you bet we’ll take it.”

As swiftly as the winding trail would permit they trotted beneath the towering pines, whose lacelike tips were touched with the soft salmon glow of the rising sun. The fog had melted away and the air was crisp and sharp like a frosty New England morning. The horses, fresh and eager, bounded over the ground with the smooth rhythm of well-oiled machines. At a fork they bore left, leaving on their right the path to the giant grove where Paloma had brought Alan on the preceding afternoon. How long ago that seemed! Ages ago, somewhere in the shadowy past.

Would they be in time? A surging dread flooded Alan’s eyes with a pounding pressure that made the trail dance blurred and indistinct. Unconsciously, he dug his heels deep and Pinto, shying forward, bumped Capitan over against the jagged outcroppings of the cliff.

“There’s no sense in doing that, doctor,”

## *THE END OF A BLIND TRAIL*

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Bart remonstrated gruffly, again guiding his mount up the trail. "You'll break your horse's legs if you try to go faster than we are doing now. It's too blamed rough!"

They were following the tumbling course of a swiftly running mountain stream. At times their way skirted shooting bunches of foam; again it wound high up on the steep slopes, with glimpses of the soapy waters far down in the gorge below. Finally, leaving the river, the trail began to zigzag up the Mountain of the Sun, whose domelike peak, veiled by the morning mist, seemed gigantic, obscure, nebulous.

Around a narrow elbow of the cliff Capitan set his forefeet with a jerk and snorted. Just ahead, stirred from its morning nap, a rattlesnake raised its puffed head and hissed; then slipped away noiselessly into a clump of greasewood. The path kept mounting steadily. Far below them the river wound, a silver thread among the black crags and boulders of the strangely sculptured cañon. In the stillness of the morning its murmur rose soothing and soft.

At a sharp turn Bart jerked up his mount, gave an oath of astonishment and slid to the

## *THE WAKE OF THE SETTING SUN*

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ground. They had come to a fork in the trail. The left branch, broad and well beaten, kept straight on to the south around the shoulder of the mountain. The right, narrow and rank with weeds, shot up a steep ravine until it seemed to bump bluntly into the straight cliff wall of the great dome of the mountain.

“There’s no doubt about it,” the foreman growled, bending over the hoof marks in the sticky, adobe soil. “That feller’s taken the right fork. There’s only been one horse over the road since the rain last night and you can see that it’s my Chubby with her off front shoe gone. But what beats me is why he should branch off into this bypath when it’s the wide trail there to the left that leads to the Rancho del Sur.”

“Where does this path end?” Alan questioned, running his eyes up its tortuous windings.

“Nowhere,” his companion declared. “It’s a blind trail that follows up this ravine and stumbles plunk into that precipice at the foot of the dome.”

“But isn’t there some means of Romero



## *THE END OF A BLIND TRAIL*

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reaching home that way? Couldn't he get over the mountain?"

"Not a chance! You can see for yourself. There's a thousand-foot straight rise to the summit from the ledge up there where the path ends, and not even a lizard could stick its claws into that slippery granite. No, sir! There's no way out of this ravine except by where we're standing this minute."

"Then you think we have him cornered?" Alan asked, his voice eager.

"It sure does look that way," the foreman shook his head dubiously. "Only, somehow, doctor, I just can't believe it."

"But why," Alan objected, as the spare, lean figure climbed into the saddle and they turned their mounts up the steep incline. "Why was this trail ever built if it leads nowhere?"

"Well! It used to lead somewhere. That's the answer. You can't see it from here, but on the ledge to the left of that waterfall there's a big cave hollered out of the cliff. The herders camp in it once in a while and they call it 'The Painted Cave.' They gave it this name because it was built by some natives called

## *THE WAKE OF THE SETTING SUN*

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Huicholes from the mainland who lived here long before the whites came and daubed up the walls with hunting pictures of men and animals. And at one end there's a chromo of a great big red guy that was their god. The señor told me once that these natives were kin to a people on the mainland called Aztecs and that they were fairly civilized. And he said they used this cave for a sort of temple."

"But this trail must have been traveled over recently," Alan persisted, "or it would have become completely wiped out."

"It has," Bart explained. "Don Alvarez was strong on this ruin stuff and quite often a highbrow from the East would blow over and he and the señor would nose around for a week at a time. That's why he kept up this path and also the La Cumbre Trail that leads up the south side of the mountain to the ruins of a sun temple on the top of the dome."

The path was rocky and full of boulders and only on the rare level stretches did hoofprints show that a horse had passed that way. As they crossed back and forth up the face of the slope, Bart kept mumbling to himself.

## *THE END OF A BLIND TRAIL*

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“Are you sure he isn’t armed?” he finally broke forth.

“He wasn’t when he left the hacienda,” Alan declared, “because this is his revolver I am carrying now.”

“I don’t see how he could have collected a gun anywhere,” Bart admitted. “Only this is no place to meet that rat if he’s got a weapon on him. He’s a dead shot. You’ve got to hand him that.”

“Why did he come up here instead of going straight on?” Alan asked. “Do you think it means harm to Miss Paloma?”

“You got me, doctor. It does seem as if we sure had him cornered, but that feller’s not the breed to run into no corner as easy as this. It’s in between the hand and the mouth that the soup is spilt. So we got to be careful.”

They had slowed to a walk now. The horses were breathing heavily from the steep ascent, their heaving sides rubbing the girths to a lather of creamy froth that dripped in gobs and hung to the grass and bushes. The path was narrow, nailed like a molding along the steep slopes of the ravine walls. Halfway along an-

## *THE WAKE OF THE SETTING SUN*

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other level stretch Bart dismounted and again bent over some hoof marks on the trail. Of a sudden he looked up at Alan.

“I’ve hooked the answer, doctor,” he exclaimed, excitedly pointing to the ground. “See them marks? Notice that three of ’em are heavy and deep sunk, while the other, the one with the shoe gone, makes nearly no trace at all. That means that my mare went lame back there and that Romero knew he couldn’t never beat us to the Rancho del Sur by the main trail. That’s why he turned off up this side path, hoping that, if we had picked up his tracks, we wouldn’t notice he had turned off. Guess he calculates lying low somewhere up here all day and then trekking it home on foot through the bush to-night. We don’t want to be too sure,” he added, pressing his knees into the ribs of the straining horse, “but a rat with one hole is soon caught and somehow or other, doctor, I got a hunch we’re going to get our man.”

They were rising steadily, drawing nearer to the smooth sheer wall that formed the perpendicular northern face of the Mountain of the



## *THE END OF A BLIND TRAIL*

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Sun. For several hundred feet along the base of this wall a level ledge projected like a shelf out over the ravine. At the left, where the trail ahead slipped up on this shelf, a group of pines had probed their roots down into the crevices of the rock and their graceful shafts and gnarled misshapen branches were painted in deep green upon the dull gray granite. At the right, far up above their heads, a stream leaped out from the bare cliff side and dropped in a graceful ribbon to the ledge below. The breeze of the morning had sprung up and, catching the narrow file, swayed it backward and forward, breaking it into tiny drops that settled like a mist of diamonds on the glistening rocks. Along the open space between the pines and the waterfall, cut back into the cliff, Alan could see a cave, whose openings were so close together that the intervening rock looked like a row of grotesque, carved pillars.

Swinging around a corner of the ravine, Bart rose in his stirrups, then turned halfway in his saddle.

“Look, doctor!” he shouted, a note of tri-

## *THE WAKE OF THE SETTING SUN*

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umph in his voice. "Thank God, we've got him!"

As Alan followed the pointing finger, his heart stopped beating for a moment, while a choking cry stuck in his throat. Just ahead a horse, completely spent, was calling on his last grain of strength to limp the final few yards up to the ledge. On the horse's back, his hat gone, his hair hanging disheveled over his forehead, sat Romero de la Guerra. Before him on the pommel, bound with a heavy cow rope, was what looked like a bag of clothes. In his left hand the Spaniard was grasping a twisted branch of manzanita. Across the intervening space came the hollow thump of heavy blows as the rider pounded the ribs of the exhausted brute.

Without taking his eyes from the horseman ahead, the foreman deliberately reached for his long-barreled Colt. Then, with a growl, he let it slip into the holster.

"It's too —— far," he muttered. "I might hit her. But —— —— I'll make that —— —— pay for beating my Chubby."

The man ahead had reached the ledge. He

## *THE END OF A BLIND TRAIL*

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stood out sharply beneath the pines as he swung from the struggling horse to the needled floor. Then, reaching up, he pulled the bundle from the pommel, slung it over his back as if it were a sack of grain, and started towards the opening of the cave. As her head swung limp over his shoulder, Paloma caught sight of the men on the trail below. Writhing, twisting in his grasp, she fought hard to free herself, and echoing out from the cliff wall came a long, agonized cry:

“Alan! Bart! Help! Hel——!”

The cry trailed away into a dull moan as the Spaniard, turning the girl around and holding her off before him, sent his fist with a crunch into her unprotected face. Then, again tipping her crumpled body over his shoulder, he disappeared from sight over the edge of the shelf.

## CHAPTER XXIV

### THE PAINTED CAVE

**A**S the long cry rang down the cañon, the two men had slid from their staggering mounts and started on a dead run up the last hundred yards to the ledge. Coming up to the level Bart, who was leading, dropped to his knee and whipped out his Colt.

“Watch out!” he warned. “He may be armed.”

However, the open space before the cave was empty, the bare rocks blistering under the beating rays of the morning sun. On the opposite side, from far up the precipice, the waterfall swayed to and fro, a veil of diamond gauze. Stretched in the cool spray, its sides plastered with bloody foam, lay an exhausted cow pony.

For a time the foreman crouched, tense, waiting.

“He’s inside behind them pillars,” he muttered finally. “We’ll have to smoke him out.”



## THE PAINTED CAVE

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Before them the cave stretched the weird façade of its many openings. Within could be glimpsed the lofty vaulted chamber hollowed back into the belly of the mountain.

“Hold on there!” Bart shouted, as his companion brushed by him and started on a run for the nearest entrance.

“What’s the matter?” Alan asked impatiently, stopping in his tracks. “I’m going in after him.”

“Not much you ain’t,” the foreman snapped out. “Leastwise you ain’t going to rush in that way; for even if he has no gun, he’d brain you with that club of his’n before your eyes had time to get used to the darkness.”

“Let’s go in together, then!” Alan persisted.

“Yes, and have him slip out through another opening and beat it down the trail. No, sir! What we’ll do is this. You kneel where you are and have your gun ready and your eyes peeled. I’ll go in through one of them openings in the center. And I’ll hold to the middle so you can see me and keep me covered. Then, if he makes for me, you let him have it. Or if he starts any hide and seek game and bolts,

## *THE WAKE OF THE SETTING SUN*

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you shoot and for the love of God shoot straight. For even if we have Miss Paloma safe now, we sure don't want that skunk to reach his burrow."

"All right," Alan agreed. "Only I wish you'd let me go in after him. You know, somehow, I'd like to be the one to get him."

As the foreman kept his eyes roving along the row of pillars, a grim smile twitched the corners of his mouth.

"Well, doctor," he drawled, "I guess you don't want him no more than me. Only, it ain't never been my principles to keep an ambitious young feller down. So go to it, boy, only for God's sake, be careful."

Gripping his revolver firmly, Alan moved cautiously forward. Keeping to the middle of the passage between the columns, he passed in under the dome of the lofty, vaulted chamber. A yard inside he dropped to one knee, his revolver leveled, his head swinging back and forth along the arc of gloom before him. The air was chill and damp like a tomb, spreading the goose flesh down his sweat-soaked body. After the glare outside motes of orange flick-

## *THE PAINTED CAVE*

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ered and darted in the choking blackness. He drew his head down between his shoulders and waited, braced. He was beginning to see dimly now and the orange flashes no longer danced before his eyes. Overhead the curve of the vault showed faint in the wan reflection creeping in between the pillars. Around him, somewhere in the gray fog, the man was lurking, and Alan strained to catch the rumor of a foot-fall or the rustle of a sleeve; no sound broke the silence but the pumping of his own heart and the quick intake of damp air through his half-open lips.

Unmindful of Bart's warning he began to grope forward towards the wall at the right, every nerve on the alert to sense the blow coming from he knew not whence. Suddenly he stiffened back in his tracks, holding his breath. Out of the darkness ahead a gruesome, monstrous figure swelled up like a billowed nightmare of his childhood, like a demon Rackshas of the East Indian fairy tales. With a grim smile he relaxed. Of course, it was only the wall painting of the Mexican god Bart had spoken of. But, catching as it did the dirty

## *THE WAKE OF THE SETTING SUN*

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light sneaking in between the pillars, the misshapen, square-limbed creature seemed to have the quiver of life in its loose joints and to be stepping flat-footed through the even granite of the end wall. The painting was crudely done in vermilion pigments with the eyes and teeth and hair in brown ocher. And where the navel should have been was a bowl-shaped disk painted black and covered with curious hieroglyphics and figures. All at once there flashed through Alan's mind a day of his boyhood when his father and he had stopped off at El Paso on their way to Arizona. In the afternoon they had crossed into Mexico and had bought from a Juarez dealer in old things a small Aztec idol. He could see it now atop the bookcase in his study in Eighty-first street and, just above the navel, was the same bowl-shaped disk that his father had informed him was an Aztec calendar. And the disk on his statue was also supported by the arms being folded across the belly, giving to the creature a similar air of comfortable benevolence, enhanced by the white-rimmed eyes of the gaping cockatoo face.

Slowly Alan kept advancing, his steps sound-



## *THE PAINTED CAVE*

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ing muffled on the slippery stone. He could see clearly now and his eyes, focused to the darkness, swept around the side walls covered with crude line drawings of stags and hunters. Here and there from the roof drops of water kept dripping with a dull patter on the shiny floor. At one place a filet trickled down and streaked the painted figures with a weird, distorting effect.

But where were Romero and Paloma? The unbroken floor offered not an inch of concealment and no opening interrupted the even smoothness of the side walls. That they were not in the cave was certain. It must be that, as he entered, they had slipped through the pillars further along the façade. But why hadn't Bart—? Running to the nearest entrance, Alan burst into the open; then brought up suddenly, blinded by the dazzling sunlight. Over by the trail the tall figure was still crouching, his revolver leveled.

"Didn't he come out?" Alan gulped, as the foreman rose and advanced to meet him.

"No," Bart answered, his eyes still sweeping up and down the façade of the temple.

## *THE WAKE OF THE SETTING SUN*

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“But he’s not in there.”

“Of course he is. There’s no other place for him to be.”

“But I tell you I——”

“You watch here!” the foreman ordered, throwing off his hat and making for the nearest entrance.

“But I am sure he isn’t in there,” Alan protested.

“I’ll root him out,” Bart flung back as he crossed the open space. “Only, if he slips by me, don’t let him get away.”

“Bart, I am sure——”

But the foreman, unheeding, had disappeared in the gloom between the pillars.

Over to the right the waterfall swished and swayed in the breeze. Now and then the anxious man could hear the nailed shoes of his companion clattering over the stone floor. Once he appeared in the furthestmost opening to the right. Then as quickly vanished. Finally his tall gaunt form was framed between the central pillars and, his head cast down, he slowly crossed to where Alan rose to meet him.

“You’re right, doctor,” he muttered de-

## *THE PAINTED CAVE*

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jectedly, thrusting his revolver in its holster. "They sure ain't there."

"But where are they?" Alan asked.

"That's what I'd like to know," the foreman scratched his head. "We saw 'em come into this rock pocket; they didn't jump over down the cañon; no fly could walk up that cliff wall; and there ain't a tree or a rock big enough for a mosquito to hide behind."

"Then they must be inside," Alan concluded.

"Only they ain't," Bart retorted. "Least-wise, I couldn't see 'em and I went over the whole coop careful."

"Let's try together," Alan suggested.

"All right, but it won't be no use. I'm not the feller to yell because I don't strike water at the first stroke of the spade. But there just ain't no place to hide in there, that's all."

A half-hour search, during which the men probed the floor and walls, threw no light on the mystery. Paloma and her captor had vanished.

## CHAPTER XXV

### SHOT THROUGH THE WALL

“**I**’M through,” Bart muttered finally, pulling out his pipe and seating himself on a long slab of stone beneath the painted image on the wall. “They just ain’t here and we might as well go back for our men and start for the Rancho del Sur.”

“He’s done us all right,” Alan agreed dejectedly, “and I am afraid—” As his eye kept on over the foreman’s shoulder and up the grotesque figure on the wall behind, he stood staring, his mouth wide open.

“What’s the matter, boy?” Bart half rose from the slab. “Have you gone *loco*?”

“Look!” Alan gasped, pointing up at the wall. “The smoke from your pipe!”

“Well, what about it?” the foreman snapped out.

“Don’t you see? It’s flowing in below the black disk on that figure’s belly.”



## SHOT THROUGH THE WALL

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“What of it?”

“Where smoke flows, there’s a draft, and where there’s a draft, there’s an opening to the air.”

“Say, feller, do you think——?”

“Sure.” Alan jumped up on the block beside the foreman. “You notice, don’t you, that that disk isn’t painted on the wall of the cave like the rest of the figure, but on a layer of rock lying farther back? From down here, in the poor light, it seems as if it were flush with the rest of the painting. But look close and you’ll see it isn’t. Here, climb up and have a look. I think we are on the track of how they got away.”

Spreading his legs, Alan braced his body against the wall and his companion clambered up his back until his steel-spiked boots cut deep into his shoulders.

“You’ve called it right, doctor!” Bart exclaimed presently. “That disk in the old boy’s belly ain’t on the wall of this cave like the rest of the figure, but on a level of rock about two feet further back in. And down between the sunk-in layer and the wall of the cave is the be-

## *THE WAKE OF THE SETTING SUN*

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ginning of a sort of smooth, funnel-like shoot slanting into the mountain. A big draft is flowing through so there must be an outlet to the air at the other end and I——”

Alan could hear his companion utter an oath of astonishment and, a moment later, he had jumped to the slab beside him.

“What do you think of this?” he exclaimed excitedly. “I found it lying just below the opening of the shoot.”

“It’s her handkerchief.” Alan bent intently over the crumpled, wet wad. “She must have been unconscious when he carried her down or she would have kept on calling.”

“That’s why he struck her,” the foreman replied thoughtfully. “He had to do it. Otherwise she would have given away his hiding place.”

“But how could he have ever raised her up there?” Alan looked at the wall dubiously. “That hole is at least ten feet above the slab we are standing on now and Miss Paloma is no light weight.”

“See them projections?” Bart pointed to some outcroppings of the stone hidden in the

## *SHOT THROUGH THE WALL*

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design. "He could grab them and pull himself up. Once he got his leg over the edge of the funnel, he could easily hoist her after him with the rope with which he had her bound. All he'd have to do would be to tie the end around his own waist before he shinnied up himself."

"Could you see where the shoot went to?"

"No. It drops pretty sharp for a couple of feet; then slopes down into the rock at an easier angle. It is too dark to see anything clear and the surface is so slippery that I didn't dare start down for fear I couldn't get back."

Alan stood with his hands clasped behind his back, gazing dejectedly at the grotesque, deformed painting on the wall.

"Tell you what you do," he said, his face brightening. "Fetch your lasso, hitch it round my waist and lower me down. I've got Miss Paloma's pocket flash and I'll explore."

"Have your gun ready!" his companion cautioned. "Like as not Romero's hiding somewhere inside and that club he's got ain't no mean weapon."

With the lariat firmly fastened under his armpits Alan dug his toes into the projections on

## *THE WAKE OF THE SETTING SUN*

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the design and pulled himself up to the mouth of the funnel. Straddling the rim, he gripped his revolver firmly and let his feet slip down the slide until his weight drew the lasso taut. Slowly Bart played out the rope until about forty feet had disappeared over the ridge of the hole above him. Then he could feel it go slack and, although it still jerked now and then, he knew that the doctor had found a resting place. The foreman was becoming uneasy when there came a series of tugs and a muffled voice seemed to issue from the rock beneath his feet. Pulling steadily, a curly head finally appeared in the opening above.

“We’ve got it straight now,” Alan began, as he clambered down beside his companion. “That shoot pitches at a fairly steep angle for twenty-five feet; then it curves out flat like a swimming slide and ends in a little circular chamber about ten feet across; and, although the surface is as slippery as ice, you can take it at full speed because the bottom of the chamber is covered with white sand so it wouldn’t hurt to be shot out on it.”



## *SHOT THROUGH THE WALL*

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“Did you see any traces of Romero and Miss Paloma?”

“Yes! There were fresh streaks where their bodies had landed; also Romero’s footprints, showing that Miss Paloma was probably senseless and he was carrying her.”

“Was there any sign of where they had gone? Is there any passage out through the cliff?”

“Not through the cliff. But a circular shaft about ten feet in diameter rises out of the chamber straight up into the mountain. There are steps cut around it and, while I am not sure, I think it reaches clear to those ruins you spoke about at the top of the dome above us. For way, way up I thought I could see a pin point of light.”

“But how do you suppose those old guys ever sunk such a hole?” Bart burst out in wonder. “Why, it’s a thousand feet from the top down here.”

“I don’t think the shaft was built by men,” Alan explained, “although those old Mexicans were splendid workers in stone.”

“Then how was it built?”

“You remember the stream leaping from the

## *THE WAKE OF THE SETTING SUN*

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cliff wall just to the right of the entrance. I have an idea this water once flowed down that shaft and poured out through the mouths of the cave where we are now.”

“But what made it change and pitch out higher up?”

“This is earthquake country and one of the sliding faults that are occurring every year or so probably shoved up this end wall here and blocked the outlet. Then the water had to find another way and chose the higher opening, eating a new channel and leaving its former course dry. All the old natives had to do was to bore through this end wall to reach the dried-up shaft and an easy way to the top of the mountain.”

“But why did them fellers conceal the opening to the shoot the way they have? Why, it’s so blamed hidden in the design on the old gink’s belly that we’d never have hit on it except by luck.”

“Perhaps they didn’t want the people to know about the shaft. Then the medicine men or priests or whatever they called them could climb down from the temple on the top of the mountain and, from the chamber below us, call

## *SHOT THROUGH THE WALL*

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up the funnel all sorts of truck and make the people in this cave believe the figure here was doing the talking. Still, Bart, your guess is as good as mine. What we have got to do now is to act."

"When you were down there did you hear any sound of them going up the shaft?"

"No! But that doesn't mean anything. We've been fooling around for over an hour and they have had ample time to reach the top of the mountain."

"And the worst of it is," Bart added gloomily, "there's that La Cumbre trail leading from the summit of the dome down the south side of the mountain until it joins the main trail about four miles beyond where we left it to come on up here. The Rancho del Sur begins a quarter of a mile south of this junction and there's a herder's shack there where the three men hang out who have charge of the herd of the mountain section. They call this place the Solano hut and it's all off for us if Romero joins up with them Mexicans; for they are armed and as bad ones as he has in his crowd and once he got Miss Paloma to El Solano we would have

## *THE WAKE OF THE SETTING SUN*

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to go back for our boys and make a fight for her. And, believe me, we'd have some job on our hands for the Granadians ain't much on the scrapping game."

"But have we time to make the junction of the trails before he does?" Alan inquired anxiously.

"It's four miles from the ruins on the top to the fork of the La Cumbre and the main trail. It's good going all the way except for a short stretch where the path runs over oil shale and is sticky from the tar oozing out of the rock. Romero has probably just about reached the summit now for, carrying Miss Paloma, it would take him about an hour to climb a thousand feet. If he were alone, there would be no question that he could get to the fork first. For we'd have to cover a good five miles and he could make quicker time running down the trail on foot than we could on horseback. But he has Miss Paloma on his hands and we ought to beat him easily, especially as he'll have a lot of trouble getting her across the oil field. Come on, though! We've lost too much time already."



## *SHOT THROUGH THE WALL*

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But Alan hesitated. "Suppose he hasn't climbed to the top at all," he objected. "Suppose he was in that room down there all the time listening to what we said and hoping that we wouldn't find his hiding place. And when I finally did go down in, just climbing up the shaft a bit and waiting, believing that, just as we are doing, we would figure it out that he was trying to get down by the La Cumbre trail and would ride around to head him off. Then all he would have to do would be to come up the shoot and take to the bush for home."

The foreman nodded thoughtfully. "We sure don't want to run no risks of his double crossing us like that," he admitted.

"Tell you what we'd better do," Alan proposed. "You start around and meet him as he comes down the trail with Miss Paloma. I'll go up the shaft and close in on him from above. Either of us can handle him alone for we are armed and he is not."

"That's a good idea," Bart agreed. "Let's go to it!"

Together they issued through the central opening and walked over near the waterfall

## *THE WAKE OF THE SETTING SUN*

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where the three horses were quietly browsing on the rich, wet grass.

“So long, doctor,” Bart called out as a moment later he swung on Capitan.

“See you later, Bart, and good luck!”

## CHAPTER XXVI

### THE CLIMB TO THE SUN

**A**S the bronzed, raw-boned figure, leaning far back in the saddle, slipped over the rim of the shelf, Alan crossed to where Pinto and Chubby were pawing the rock, impatient at being abandoned by their fellow. Taking from Pinto's saddle bag a box of crackers, the remains of some herder's lunch, he felt that his flash and revolver were secure in his pockets and passed in once more between the massive pillars. Clambering up to the disk on the figure's paunch, he hesitated for a second, gazing down the polished shoot. Then, putting his hands before him as though diving, he threw himself flat and let go. A swift rush through the dark and he was shot like a bundle on to the soft floor. Scrambling to his feet, spitting the sand from his lips, he turned to the foot of the spiral stairway that wound up through the belly of the mountain.

## *THE WAKE OF THE SETTING SUN*

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For some time he climbed rapidly, hugging the curving wall to keep from slipping off the glossy steps into the central well that seemed to draw him with a steady pull. His flash played fitfully on the smooth sides from which threads of water were oozing. In the damp heavy air his breath showed in rapid white puffs as from a spent horse on a foggy morning.

Once he brought up sharply and whipped out his gun, then kept on as the shadow above melted under the rays of the flash. His lungs felt raw, as if some one were scraping them with a rake, and there came to his memory that day when the elevators in the Singer Building had broken down and he had climbed to his lawyer's office in the tower. Drops of sweat kept trickling into his eyes and he threw his head back with irritation as, with the back of his hand, he wiped away their salty flow.

Constantly he marveled at the man ahead. Granted that he knew the way, the effort of carrying such a burden up this stairway seemed superhuman. But why had he carried her off? The reason was obvious and Alan shuddered as he realized that only Paloma stood between



## *THE CLIMB TO THE SUN*

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the Spaniard and his possession of the entire island. With the Mexicans at his back right would fall to the strong on Corona del Mar. Once safe at the Rancho del Sur, the girl's life would depend on——

For a hundred yards Alan ran upwards two steps at a time. Then, his mouth wide open, his lungs working like bellows, he slowed his gait and, his face drawn, he plugged doggedly on. The pin point of light overhead was growing ever larger. At the end of a half hour it had become a constantly expanding saucer of deep blue in the midst of which shone a star. He wondered at this until he remembered that down in mines the stars are visible. He blessed that disk of blue, for his flash was growing dimmer and he was forced to make his way by the wan light filtering down the black-walled flue. Only a little more and he would come out into the azure above. Throwing his last ounce into a final spurt he ran up the remaining steps. Suddenly he threw himself flat on his face to keep from pitching headfirst into the gloom of the well. The stairway had come to a sudden

## *THE WAKE OF THE SETTING SUN*

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end on a little platform projecting like a diving shelf over the shaft beneath.

Gingerly Alan rose to his feet. By the light eating away the shadows down the sides of the shaft he could see that, from the shelf on which he was standing to the rim above, no steps or projections broke the smoothness of the polished sides, which curved like the dome of a lime kiln to its moss-lined mouth above. To climb it was out of the question. He trembled slightly as he realized that he had reached an *impasse*.

Gradually his breath and strength returned, his nerves became quieter and he turned to examine his narrow perch. That Romero and Paloma had come to this platform there was no reasonable ground for doubt; that they had gone on was certain; then, there must be a way. Lighting a match, he carefully examined the walls. A shout of relief echoed strangely in the hollow tube and caused some bats hanging above his head to flutter. Cut in the solid rock at his elbow was the frame of a great square door, a handleless door, a massive, crude example of the stone cutter's art. At his feet, close

## *THE CLIMB TO THE SUN*

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to the wall, a twisted lever of some yellowish metal projected a foot from the floor. Stooping, grasping it firmly, Alan pulled. The grinding of stone upon stone and the great block of granite slowly pivoted on its axis. While through the widening crack, flowing in a cooling, steady stream, came the freshening, briny tang of a salt-soaked ocean breeze. Pushing through the opening fissure, bounding along a short passage and up a narrow flight of steps, he burst out on to the sun-flooded summit of Sun Mountain.

For a time Alan groped blindly, his sight drowned by the intense glare. As the tears cleared away, he crouched, dizzy from the pull of the great depths around him. Far below, a plain lay like a carpet of green velvet on the smooth, blue floor of the channel. Out of its even, rolling sweep the spurs of the range reached up to buttress the great granite pedestal that formed the summit of the mountain. Skirting its base, the main trail to the south wound brown amidst the black green of the pines. To the north the jagged spine of the ridge coiled like some prehistoric serpent until

it stuck its sharp, gray snout into the frothy surf of the ocean. Around the Northern Point splashes of thistle-down marked the hacienda and its buildings. Up over the sea wall floated the faint boom of the breakers, bowling in from the islands on the other side of the globe. As far as the eye could reach, out beyond the edge of the curve of the world, a field of lapis-lazuli streaked with purple and green shimmered in the heat of the summer's noon.

Alone to the south the flat top of the pedestal did not drop off in a sheer precipice, but, tilting sharply, pitched down to the main ridge that twisted away to where, beyond the white specks of the Rancho del Sur, its tail lashed into laughing foam the long swells from the Pacific. The air was still, but for the breeze that softly seethes around great heights. The world was still, but for the mysterious murmurs of space, the half-heard whirling of distant suns, the faint echoes of infinity.

As Alan looked around him he saw that he was standing in the midst of the ruins of an old temple that, in bygone days, had occupied the northern end of the platform at the summit.



## *THE CLIMB TO THE SUN*

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In the rough form of a rectangle were scattered huge blocks of stone, all worn and scarred by time, some covered with strange carvings and weird hieroglyphics. Before the temple stretched an open space that occupied the remainder of the platform and was inclosed on all sides by a parapet wall. In its center stood a curiously carved altar of grayish, soapy marble, sunk in the top of which was a weather-greened copper bowl for the sacred fire. Through the parapet on the south an opening led down over a flight of steps cut in the steeply curving granite of the dome. At their foot began the La Cumbre trail, zigzagging like a flash of lightning on to the plains below.

Peering behind the great stone slabs, Alan cautiously picked his way along the platform. It was empty. Evidently Romero and Paloma had kept on down the trail. Clattering over the chipped stone around the altar, he brought up with a jerk. From somewhere the sound of a low moan was carried faintly to his ears. He waited, tense, listening. It came again, apparently from up over the sea face. Rushing to the flat wall, he leaned far out. The cliff at

this point dropped sheer. Around its base the restless waters swirled and surged, patterned with designs of white filigree on a deep green ground. Just over the parapet at his feet the edge of the cliff had been cut back into a sort of niche, like those recesses in the walls of Gothic cathedrals destined to receive the statues of saints. Chiseled out of the back of this niche was a seat of carved stone. The whole made by some nature-loving priest in charge of the fire, who, sheltered from the north wind, could let his thoughts wander out over the vast distances of the ocean.

As Alan peered down, his pulses jumped and he pressed hard on the smooth marble to keep from pitching over. Thrown back in the seat just below, hooped like a mummy with a thick cow rope, lay Paloma. A line of red streaked her forehead, from which a small fllet of blood had trickled down and matted her eyebrow. She lay still, her feet propped firmly against the narrow ledge to keep from slipping forward. Now and again she threw her head from side to side and moaned like a wounded animal.

Gripping the edge of the parapet, Alan turned

## *THE CLIMB TO THE SUN*

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and let himself down until his feet rested on the floor of the niche. As a shadow came before her, the girl opened her eyes, trying to see through the searing rays of the beating sun. Then, with a little cry, she closed her lids and lay still.

“Thank God, you’ve come,” she whispered hoarsely.

Bending forward, Alan lifted her in his arms. Then, standing on the seat, he gradually raised her above his head and carefully slid her on to the broad top of the parapet. He scrambled up and lowered her into the shade of its marble side. Kneeling, his fingers tugged at the knots that left scarlet welts across the ivory of her skin. She lay relaxed, her eyes closed, her lips half open. For a flash it occurred to him that she had fainted and he shook her gently. The lids fluttered and she smiled weakly up into his face.

“Mary Mother,” she said low. “It’s so good to have the pain of those ropes gone and that sun out of my eyes.”

“But your head?” he asked, worried, wiping away the matted blood.

## *THE WAKE OF THE SETTING SUN*

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“It is nothing.”

“But did he knock you senseless?”

“I think it must be so, but it was the sun that was terrible. And I not able to move for fear of slipping over the edge.”

Tenderly Alan bent over her and put his arm beneath her shoulders.

“You poor little girl,” he murmured.

As he started to raise her against the parapet, she drew in her breath quickly and her face winced.

“What is it?” he inquired anxiously.

“I know not,” she set her teeth, “but when I move, it seems as if I were paralyzed, yet as if a knife was cutting into my legs.”

“That is natural,” Alan reassured her. “The rope has pressed on the veins and stopped the flow of blood. Let me rub you and the circulation will come back.”

For a time he worked steadily, his firm, strong fingers kneading the swollen ankles. Neither spoke. When he finally raised his head, she was looking down at him, a plaintive, far-away look in her eyes.



## *THE CLIMB TO THE SUN*

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“I knew you’d come,” she said softly.  
“Only, I was afraid——”

She passed her hand wearily across her forehead. Alan moved up and sat beside her.

“Where is he?” he asked.

“He started down the trail two hours ago.”

“Why did he leave you here?”

For a moment Paloma looked out over the sea wall.

“He knew everything depended on his being the first to reach the Solano Hut where his herders live. And he left me because I slowed his speed.”

“How long will it take him to reach the fork of the La Cumbre and the main trail?”

“About an hour and a half, I should think. A man on foot can run down faster than one on horseback and the way is good except across the oil field.”

“You say he started about two hours ago?”

Paloma nodded.

“Then,” Alan concluded, “he must have passed the fork and reached the herder’s hut by now.”

## *THE WAKE OF THE SETTING SUN*

---

“Assuredly,” the girl answered. “That is, if Bart has not headed him off.”

“Bart has lost his race.” Alan shook his head gravely. “He only started two hours ago and it would take him that long to reach the fork.”

“That is bad, not so?” Paloma declared. “For now my cousin not only can gather in his Mexicans, but he can bring back those men at the Solano Hut and block us from getting home down the trail.”

“We still have the shaft,” Alan reminded her. “And the horses are outside the cave.”

“I had forgotten.” Paloma brightened. “But don’t you think they will ambush Bart when he reaches the fork?”

“No!” Alan replied. “He ought to get there about the time that Romero reaches the Solano Hut and I think he will probably start right on up here.”

“Unless he returns to the hacienda for our Granadians,” Paloma suggested.

“He will not do that,” Alan explained, “for he will suppose that your cousin is bringing

## *THE CLIMB TO THE SUN*

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you down the trail and he will come on up to try to intercept him.”

“Then if Romero and his men start up the trail later, they will have him bottled in.”

“Don’t worry about Bart,” Alan reassured her. “He has the shaft just as we have. The important thing is that we have you out of his hands.”

“I suppose I should be thankful,” the girl agreed thoughtfully. “For I do stand in the way of all he wishes in this world, do I not?”

“What did he say to you on the way up?” Alan inquired.

“Nothing. He only spoke once and that was after he had lowered me into the niche and had started to walk away. As I heard his steps grow fainter, I became frightened for a second and called. In a moment he was bending over the parapet.”

“‘You’re not going to leave me tied this way?’ I said.

“‘I can’t take you unless you hurry,’ he answered. ‘Will you be sensible and come along?’

“I did not reply, but my eyes must have told him something for he nodded his head slowly

## *THE WAKE OF THE SETTING SUN*

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and leaned over until his face was close to mine.

“ ‘I want you, Paloma,’ he said, ‘and, by God, I’m going to have you. Only, you’ve got to change your temper a bit before you will make me a good girl.’ Then he pushed himself back over the parapet and I could hear his footsteps die away down the trail.”

For a time Paloma lay back against the stone, her eyes closed, her breath coming quickly. At last she gave a little shiver and half raising herself on one hand, held out the other to her companion.

“ ‘Help me up!’ ” she said, resolutely. “ ‘I feel better now and we must start down.’ ”

Her arm around his shoulder, she limped across the open space to the head of the stairway. Slowly they made their way down the rough steps and turned into the short passage leading to the mouth of the shaft. As Alan’s glance shot ahead, he stopped dead.

“ ‘Good Lord!’ ” he burst out. “ ‘The door has swung shut.’ ”

Blocking the passage, a smooth, massive wall of granite stared them in the face.



## *THE CLIMB TO THE SUN*

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“What a fool I was!” he muttered. “I ought to have guessed it would swing back, but I was so anxious about getting to you that I didn’t think of anything.”

“Is there no way of opening it from this side?” Paloma asked, her voice trembling slightly.

“There was once.” Alan pointed to a groove in the floor near the wall. “But the chain has been removed.”

“Then that means—” the color left the girl’s face.

“It means,” his voice, too, was strained, “it means that the way down the shaft is blocked.”

## CHAPTER XXVII

### THE RACE FOR THE TAR FIELD

“**B**UT my cousin and his men will come up the trail,” she murmured, half to herself.

Alan shook his head. “I’m afraid they have us trapped,” he admitted gravely.

“But, my Alan,” her voice broke, “suppose they find you and——”

Gently he bent over her and touched her forehead with his lips.

“Keep your nerve, dear!” he said firmly. “We are going to win out somehow. Nothing can separate us now.”

Slowly Alan and Paloma climbed the stairway and came out once more on the sun-flooded platform. It was past noon. Overhead bunches of cotton were lazily sailing, trailing fleeting patches of shadow along the rugged peaks. Under their covering the ridge seemed black and cold and gloomy. But when the cloud had

## *THE RACE FOR THE TAR FIELD*

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floated by, the craggy summits shone warm in the sunshine and the somber valleys were brightened by blue patches of wild lilacs.

At the south end of the summit where the trail cut through the parapet, Paloma stopped and pointed. Down where the cañon emptied on the plain, annihilated by the great distance, a white dot showed against the olive green. Above, a scroll of tenuous blue twisted straight into the sky.

“It’s the herder’s hut,” she said. “If we only knew if Bart——”

The crack of a shot bounded back and forth up the cañon walls and they bent forward, straining to pierce the screen of oaks and sycamores hiding the valley floor. Three more shots, deeper, fuller, resounded in quick succession.

“Things have started down there,” Alan muttered.

She nodded. “That short bark was Bart’s revolver. The volley was from rifles.”

“Those shots came from at least halfway up the cañon,” Alan went on. “It has turned out just as we thought. Bart reached the fork

## *THE WAKE OF THE SETTING SUN*

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after Romero and, not knowing that he had passed him, started up the trail. Then Romero returned with his men and, having fresh horses, overtook him. Now, Bart is trying to hold them back long enough to reach us.”

“Then we had better start,” she urged. “For, with only six cartridges in your gun, our only hope of standing them off lies in joining Bart.”

“Shouldn’t we wait up here?” Alan objected. “This would be a splendid place to hold.”

“There is one more suited below,” the girl explained, starting to pick her way down the steep steps cut in the dome. “About a half mile from here the valley runs level for a little and then drops straight over to the tar field I spoke of. It takes any one a long time to cross this field, because the feet slip. And, unless we cover him from above so Romero cannot shoot at him, Bart will never be able to traverse it and live.”

They had reached the foot of the steps and were slipping down a narrow path sunk in a crack of the great granite monolith. Boulders strewn the way and Alan kept hold of the arm



## *THE RACE FOR THE TAR FIELD*

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of Paloma, who still limped slightly. Gradually the rift in the dome widened, clumps of sage and greasewood gripped their roots into crevices in the rock and a snowflower showed its brilliant scarlet head. As the sound of firing was again blown to their ears, Paloma dropped her companion's arm and hurried on ahead.

"Come!" she called back, "we must hurry. For, Alan, we just must reach the ledge before Bart comes to the tar field."

The path was sloping more gradually now, skirting a swift stream that tumbled down the ever widening valley. For a second, beside a pool, the man and the girl threw themselves flat and plunged their cracked lips into the cool, green waters. Then, with a gasp of relief, they pushed on. At the end of a quarter of an hour the trail bore left, then elbowed sharply between two boulders and ran out on to a peaceful valley nestled between the cliffs of the range.

Its even floor was covered with a thick rug of ferns and grass, splashed with daubs of orange poppies. Along the eastern wall the stream flowed, its surface shiny like black ice.

## *THE WAKE OF THE SETTING SUN*

---

No trees broke the sheer expanse of green, except at the lower end where two giant pines rose like sentinels. The inclosing walls were straight, inaccessible, unbroken. Across their rims, far above, the canvas of the sky stretched smooth and blue. Just beyond the pines the grass ended in a cliff that dropped sheer for a hundred feet to a similar level valley beneath. Over this cliff the stream tumbled, beating itself into frothy foam that rose in a mist and floated off against the smooth precipice.

Following its course Alan and Paloma pushed on beyond the pines and peered over the edge. Below them was a little level valley, inclosed, like the ledge above, by the towering cliffs of the ridge. At its southern end it merged into a tree-filled cañon that meandered down on the plains. But about two hundred yards from where they were standing the oaks and sycamores ended in a clean-cut line. And from this point to the base of the precipice at their feet the valley was covered with a layer of oil, thick and sticky as tar, that was oozing from the straight shale walls on either side. Slowly the gummy waves lapped over one another until,

## *THE RACE FOR THE TAR FIELD*

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beneath the eastern cliff, they slipped into the stream. In its clear, cold waters the oil hardened into great disks of inky putty and either sank to the coal black bed or were carried by the swift current down to the sea. Dotting the tarry field, pools of dirty brown were scattered thick where the lighter oil had risen to the surface of the heavier base. To their nostrils rose the pungent, irritating smell of gasoline.

For a time they stood looking down. Then Paloma touched Alan's elbow and pointed.

"See! There are his tracks!" she exclaimed.

At a spot just below the western cliff the flow had stopped, and, over an area of several yards, the oil had hardened into the consistency of molder's clay. Sunk deep in its plastic surface were the marks of heavy boots.

"Why didn't he walk down the bed of the stream?" Alan asked. "Even if it is wet, it looks like much easier going than across that oil."

"You would think so, not so?" the girl explained, "but it is much better where he went. There is a gummy layer all along the bottom of

## *THE WAKE OF THE SETTING SUN*

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the river and you sink in right up to your knees. A few years ago, we had a lot of trouble with the cattle straying up here and getting stuck until father had the mouth of the cañon fenced off."

Alan ran his hand through his hair and stood gazing thoughtfully downward. "Even if we cover him," he said gravely, "it is going to be a tough pull for Bart to get across. It will take him a minute at least to make it and he will be a splendid target."

As the shots kept rattling ever louder up the walls of the cañon, Paloma seized her companion's arm.

"See that clearing about a quarter of a mile down there?" she said, excitedly. "By the sounds I should say they are nearly there. It's the only other open space on the trail and Bart will have to make a dash for it just the same as he will here. Only, he has not the oil to stop him."

As she spoke there burst out of the pines bordering the clearing a horse, its belly close to the ground. Crouching forward on its outstretched neck clung a long, spare form. His



## *THE RACE FOR THE TAR FIELD*

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hat was gone. His hair, blown back over his forehead, was mixed with the mane of his mount of which he seemed a part. Once, when the exhausted beast stumbled, the man appeared to lift him up and carry him on by sheer force of his will. He was two thirds across the open space when a second rider crashed out of the pines, jerked his horse on his haunches, and jumped to the ground. Coolly he raised his rifle and covered the swaying foreman. Paloma bent forward, the muscles of her face twitching as on strings.

“It’s Romero!” she gasped. “Holy Mary, he will kill him.”

From his position along the horse’s neck, Bart kept glancing back over his shoulder. As his pursuer balanced his rifle, he swerved sharply and with the swiftness of a lizard, slipped over the mustang’s side. A puff of cotton from the dull barrel and Capitan bounded sidewise, staggered a few steps, then pitched forward in a heap.

“He’s hit him!” Paloma groaned, gnawing her knuckles.

“No! It’s his horse!” Alan said, as the fore-

## *THE WAKE OF THE SETTING SUN*

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man scrambled to his feet and, stooping double, dashed in a zigzag for the shelter of the forest. Again the kneeling figure methodically leveled his rifle and followed the dodging man. It seemed an age before there came a second puff of smoke, Romero's shoulder jerked back quickly, and a resounding crack awoke the echoes of the walls. For a moment the girl held her breath, then a cry broke from her throat.

“He's made it!” she sobbed. “Mary Mother, he's made it!”

## CHAPTER XXVIII

### THE FIGHT IN THE CAÑON

**A**S the tall, gaunt figure was swallowed up in the pines, Romero had vaulted in the saddle and his heels beat a double tattoo against his horse's flanks. But, before the animal could bound forward, three horsemen shot past him out of the forest and dashed on in full cry across the clearing. They were big, powerful men and their red shirts bulged from their leather coats like the entrails of a gored bull. Begrimed sheep-fleece leggings covered their legs. Under the broad brims of their greasy, high-crowned hats, their matted hair and bristly, stubby beards showed like bands of soot across the chocolate of their skin. Their elbows swung rhythmically with the motion of their mounts. One hand gripped the reins with which they kept up a continuous lashing of their horses' heads. Two held rifles, the butts swinging free. The third was unarmed, having

## *THE WAKE OF THE SETTING SUN*

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evidently turned over his weapon to his leader. In its stead he carried a coil of cow rope.

As the forest hid the galloping men, Paloma looked at Alan and shuddered. For a moment his teeth bit into his lower lip. Then his jaw set in a firm, hard line.

“We’re in for it!” he said, opening the breech of his revolver and snapping the trigger.

In the woods below a sharp crack rang out; then another; then a scattering volley. One of the bullets chugged against the cliff wall at their feet, then fell with a splash into the bog of oil below.

“Do you think he’s making a stand?” Paloma questioned, anxiously.

“He’s got to,” Alan answered. “He’s on foot now and can run up these rough trails as fast as a horse. Every time he makes them get off and fire, he gains just the time it takes for them to mount again.”

Another fusillade of shots, and Bart’s revolver spoke in quick succession like the explosions of a motor boat. Then the sound of running, the more distant echo of horses’ hoofs, and the foreman burst through an opening in



## *THE FIGHT IN THE CAÑON*

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the trees and plunged ahead across the oil field.

Several seconds later a horseman shot over the brow of the trail and reined up on the edge of the oil. Braced against the high-backed saddle he stood sharply outlined on the deep green of the pines. Deliberately Alan rested his Colt in a groove on a boulder overhanging the rim and laid the sight on the frosting eye of the Mexican. Before he could pull the trigger, Paloma gripped his arm.

“Don’t shoot!” she warned. “He isn’t armed. He has given his gun to Romero.”

As she spoke, a second rider pulled up beside his comrade, who sidled along towards the cliff to give him room. Slipping to the ground, the newcomer leveled his rifle at the foreman wallowing in the gluey oil fifteen yards away.

Alan’s muscles tightened, his shoulder jerked back and, as the shot rang out, the Mexican spun round like a top and sank to the ground in a heap, while his horse, its bridle dragging, moved off into the forest placidly cropping the grass.

“You hit him!” Paloma exclaimed, her nos-

## *THE WAKE OF THE SETTING SUN*

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trils dilated, her lips drawn back in a half-exultant smile.

"I guess so." Alan passed his hand across his eyes to shut out the sight of the ruby stream pumping in jets out of the hole in the gingerbread cheek. As he raised his head, Romero and the third herder were framed in the opening of the trail, their gaze traveling from the man on the ground to the boulder on the ledge above. Suddenly Paloma gave a startled cry.

"Look!" she burst out, her voice quivering. "Over by the cliff!"

Below the western wall on a flat layer of shale that projected well into the oil, the unarmed Mexican was standing in his stirrups. Above his head he was swinging a sweeping coil of rope, unnoticed by the foreman who, advancing sidewise, his head turned back, was watching Romero and his companion. Paloma strained forward over the edge of the cliff.

"Bart! Bart!" she cried frantically. "Look out! Over by the cliff!"

As she called, the loop swished through the air and sank gracefully over the shoulders of the floundering man. For a flash his arms beat

## *THE FIGHT IN THE CAÑON*

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the air like a swimmer caught in kelp. Then, as the herder wheeled and dug his spurs in deep, the rope drew taut, Bart's feet flew out and like a log of wood on well-soaped skids, he bumped over the slippery ooze.

Half rising, Alan fired. A laughing taunt in Spanish showed that the bullet had missed its mark. A rifle cracked and a shot thugged like putty against the great pine at their back.

"Holy Virgin, that was close!" Paloma exclaimed, dragging her companion into the shelter of the boulder.

"You stay down!" Alan advised. "Let me be the one to see what is going on."

Cautiously he peered through the groove, then ducked.

"They've got him," he muttered. "Romero jumped on him as the other fellow pulled him along."

Presently a growl of anger burst from his lips.

"What has happened?" Paloma questioned, anxiously.

"Bart tried to put up a fight when they took his gun away," he answered grimly, "and Ro-

## *THE WAKE OF THE SETTING SUN*

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mero clubbed him with the butt of his rifle. They are roping him to a tree now and his head is hanging limp. He is knocked out all right."

"They're coming!" he added after a moment. "Romero is over below the west cliff and the other two are following up beside the stream."

Once more Alan rested his revolver on the edge of the boulder and fired. An answering volley sent a flight of splinters stinging their faces.

"Missed him!" he exclaimed as he ducked to shelter.

"Do you not think," the girl remonstrated, "that it would be better to wait until they are nearer? You have only three shots left."

"I can't wait," Alan explained. "If they get close under the cliff or on the trail up here it's impossible to see them. It's now or never."

Once more Alan raised his head above the rock parapet, his forearm jerked back, and the man nearest the stream threw up his arms and toppled heavily on his back. He lay quite still, his knees drawn up against his chin, while the bullets again spattered splinters over the boulder.



## *THE FIGHT IN THE CAÑON*

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“You hit him!” Paloma exclaimed eagerly, peering around the corner of the boulder.

“It took two shots,” Alan shook his head gravely. “I have only one left.”

“Use it on Romero!” the girl said in a low voice, her teeth clenched. “He is the important one.”

The Spaniard had left the western wall and was sidling in towards the foot of the trail at the base of the cliff. He was bent forward, the muzzle of his rifle sweeping the boulder on the rim above. His moist lips were half open. Occasionally his eyes winked quickly as if he were afraid to keep the lids long closed. Once he called something in Spanish to his companion further over towards the stream.

Deliberately the doctor raised his head and brought the tiny bead where the man's teeth showed white under the black mustache. Simultaneously two shots rang out and Alan, with a sharp cry, pitched heavily forward against the rock. For a second, he lay crumpled up; then, struggling to his knees he looked around, dazed.

“Oh, my Alan are you badly hurt?” Paloma

## *THE WAKE OF THE SETTING SUN*

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asked anxiously, pointing to the blood trickling over his ear.

Slowly he put his hand to his head, felt it for a moment, and stared at the carmine stain on his finger tips.

“It’s nothing!” he reassured her, his senses clear. “His bullet just grazed the skin. Let’s see what I did!”

Cautiously he stuck his head above the rock, then dropped beside his companion.

“I missed him,” he groaned. “His shot must have turned my aim.”

“Are they coming?” Paloma asked.

“No! Romero is standing up and isn’t even looking our way. I think he has guessed that we have used up the six shots in the revolver.”

They sat looking at each other, their thoughts chasing through their brains in a mad whirl. The girl’s eyes were wide open, her face drawn, her fingers convulsively crushing in a lump the cloth of her skirt. At last Alan rose to a crouching position, squatting on his heels.

“What shall we do?” she said at last, her throat dry.

## *THE FIGHT IN THE CAÑON*

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“Wait for them,” Alan answered grimly.

“Why not at the top of the mountain?”

“It is better here. They cannot see me until they come up over the edge of the rim and I may be able to close with them.”

“But they will kill you, my Alan.” The girl’s voice ended in a sob.

For an instant he did not answer. Then, stooping, he took her gently in his arms.

“God help us, dear!” he whispered brokenly.  
“It’s the only way.”

## CHAPTER XXIX

### THE FATE OF A DESPERATE CHANCE

THE two men had again turned towards the ledge and were advancing leisurely, raising their feet from the sticky oil like cats caught on fly paper. Over by the stream the Mexican was but fifteen yards from the foot of the trail when a gasp from Paloma made Alan turn. The girl had risen to her full height and her trembling hand was pointing out across the oil field. From her throat came incoherent sounds and she kept moistening her lips, struggling to speak. As the man followed the direction of her finger, he, too, started, his eyes staring.

Around the tree to which the helpless foreman had been tied the rope still coiled. But the loops hung limp; the man within was gone. A movement over by the western cliff drew Alan's eye. On a flat slab that jutted out into the oil Bart was kneeling, like a washerwoman



## *THE FATE OF A DESPERATE CHANCE*

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by the river's edge. In one hand he gripped a giant cone that had fallen from the great pine near the cliff. Around it he had wrapped layers of dry, gray moss from the live oak overhead and he was rolling over and over the thirsty mass in the surface oil of a pool lying just beneath the slab. Suddenly he rose, fumbled in his vest and struck a match on his heel. A flash of flame and he flung the blazing sop far out across the field. In a graceful parabola it rose and fell halfway between Romero and his follower. A moment it lay sputtering while the tall, gaunt figure bent forward, his fists clenched, one knee raised. Then he let out a shout that bounded back and forth against the cañon walls. For, with a seething hiss, the light surface oil had caught and a whirling spiral of flame went sweeping up the cañon.

At the foreman's cry the Mexican had wheeled and his face went creamy buff. Then, like a rabbit before the swoop of a hawk, he threw himself forward. At his heels surged the ever widening circle of fire, shooting tongues of brick red far up into the sky. Five yards from the foot of the trail the whirlwind swept

## *THE WAKE OF THE SETTING SUN*

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over him. Ablaze, he kept bounding into the air, his features bulging with pain. Gradually his leaps grew lower and lower, like a rubber ball bouncing itself out. All at once he rose high, threw his arms above his head and, with a low, gurgling yell, disappeared in the smoke.

Fascinated, Paloma stood gazing at the sooty billows rolling with a roar up the cañon walls. As she shuddered and started to turn away, Alan seized her by the arm.

“Look! Your cousin!” he said hoarsely.

Romero was standing as though struck to stone, his eyes glued on the place where his follower had disappeared. The flames were spreading, widening like ripples on a pool where a bass has broken. All at once he seemed to realize his own danger and, with a start, looked around him. Then, throwing away his rifle, he plunged back towards the woods. Immediately he brought up short. Except for a narrow strip below the western cliff the cañon was now a roaring furnace, smudging with swelling waves of dirty black the blue skylight overhead. Wallowing like a man in a mire, the Spaniard started towards this narrow corridor

## *THE FATE OF A DESPERATE CHANCE*

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to safety. Once he slid full length, then scrambled to his feet and staggered on.

“He’ll make it,” Alan burst out, as the swarthy figure brought up hard against the western wall and with one hand began to grope his way along the rock to where Bart was waiting.

As he spoke, the wind dropped dead and the flames, angry at being held back, gathered themselves together and rushed at the struggling man. As they broke over his ankles, he gave a roar of pain and, half turning, sprang against the cliff. Desperately his fingers pawed the slippery shale, seeking a fissure. The oil on one boot was blazing and for a moment he hung, kicking madly. Then, with a grunt of relief, he climbed upwards.

The wind had freshened once more and Alan and Paloma moved along to the western corner of the ledge where they could see Romero hoisting himself like a huge beetle up the precipitous cliff. He was almost on a level with them now, not ten yards distant, and his smut-streaked face worked convulsively under the pain of the

## *THE WAKE OF THE SETTING SUN*

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heat below. Once he looked their way and Alan felt the hand on his arm tighten.

“It’s horrible!” he murmured. “Isn’t there something we can do to help him?”

“Let him alone!” the girl’s voice was hard. “He would have killed you if he could.”

But Alan shook his head.

“Wait here!” he said, starting back for the trail. Presently he returned, swinging the rope used to bind Paloma. Putting his hands to his mouth, he shouted, straining to make his voice carry above the dull roar of the fire. Slowly the Spaniard turned; then he paused, undecided, his jawbone working back and forth under his swarthy skin. Finally, digging his shoes into the rock, he reached to catch the throw. The rope shot out, hung straight, then slapped back against the wall. Repeatedly Alan tried to reach the marooned man, gripping a bush and stretching far over the seething whirlpool. Again and again the rope fell short. At last, without a word, the Spaniard faced the wall and continued on his painful climb.

He was evidently trying to reach the ledge on which Paloma and Alan stood, working his



## THE FATE OF A DESPERATE CHANCE

way diagonally across the cliff face. But the shale had given way to granite and it was only by gripping the tips of his fingers and toes into the tiny cracks that he could cling to the smooth stone. Painfully, slowly, he had covered a yard or more when a sliver of rock on which his foot was resting slipped and his body, freed of its support, shot full length with a jerk that almost pulled his arms from their sockets. He swung back and forth, his feet pawing desperately up and down the slippery rock; then exhausted, he hung still, a low moaning coming from his throat like the querulous complaint of a sick child. Twice he struggled to push his fingers into a crack further along. Each time he dug his bleeding nails into their former hold to keep from falling. Then he hung quite still. His strength was fast ebbing and his fingers gradually straightened until he was hanging by the two lower phalanges alone. His face was tallowy and his teeth showed like a dead rat's beneath his black mustache. Suddenly he gave a low, despairing groan, his fingers relaxed and his tall figure shot straight down, his features distorted, his eyes bulging

## *THE WAKE OF THE SETTING SUN*

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as if some finger within were pushing them from their sockets. As he fell, he flattened out backward like a squirrel skin drying on a board. Ten yards down his head snapped against a spit of rock with a crunch of spattered bone. Then his body, the arms waving limp, dove headfirst into the flames.

## CHAPTER XXX

### THE WAKE OF THE SETTING SUN

**A**S the Spaniard fell, Alan had rushed along the ledge and started to grope his way down the trail leading to the oil field. A few yards below the rim he sank from view in the dense billows of smoke pouring up the cliff face. At length he emerged on the ledge again, staggering slightly, rubbing his eyes.

“I couldn’t make it,” he gasped chokingly.

“It was impossible to get halfway down.”

“Why did you try?” Paloma declared. “He was dead when his body struck the cliff.”

“It is horrible, horrible,” Alan kept repeating. “If only, only that rope had reached.”

“But Alan,” Paloma said earnestly, “we should not regret. He tried to kill you and the world is not for such as he. Come!” she added, moving over towards the western wall. “Let us see what Bart is doing.”

## *THE WAKE OF THE SETTING SUN*

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Above their heads a crow was circling, cawing raucously. Up from the falls rose a sizzling hiss as the water of the stream fell on the flaming oil. The wind had freshened and the narrow strip beneath the precipice was once more clean of smoke. Under the giant pine they could see the foreman kneeling, bandaging with a red bandanna the eye of the man Alan first had shot. Behind him the second Mexican lay full length, turning now and then from side to side and beating the ground with his fists.

“Bart must have waded out and dragged them in,” Alan exclaimed in a relieved tone. “Thank God, I didn’t kill them.”

The foreman had finished his task, and as he rose he saw the man and the girl on the ledge above.

“You people had better get out by the shaft,” he shouted, putting his hands like a funnel to his mouth. “It will take days for this fire to burn down enough for you to cross here.”

“But, Bart, we can’t make it alone,” Alan called back. “The chain that opens the door through the wall at the top of the shaft is on



## *THE WAKE OF THE SETTING SUN*

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the inside and you'll have to ride around to the cave, climb up and let us through."

"Righto!" came the answer. "I'll drop these greasers at the hut, get a lantern, and come for you as quick as I can. But it will be a good six hours, 'cause the dark is fallin'."

The fire lulled and they could hear the foreman growling at the Mexicans as he lifted them on their horses. Presently came a long drawn out:

"So long, folks!"

"Good-by, Bart!" they called in return, and arm in arm they turned up the grass-coated valley.

Gradually they left behind the stifling smoke that hung like a mirky shroud above the somber cañon. Night was beginning to fall. Down between the cliffs the sun had vanished and the shadows of the evening laid their soft covering over all. Starting up the trail to the summit, they paused now and then to draw into their thirsty lungs great gulps of twilight-sweetened air. At an elbow of the spur they stopped and stood looking back. The fire was just below them, shooting brick-red tongues of flame

## *THE WAKE OF THE SETTING SUN*

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through the smudgy canopy. Between the v-shaped opening of the valley the great plain stretched away, sweeping out to the foam-fringed blue of the channel. Across its smooth green velvet the northern flock was slowly moving, seeking shelter from the coming night.

The shadows of the evening were falling deeper and in the depths of the eddying stream the rocks seemed black and mysterious. Somewhere in the pine a bird was singing to its mate. Their arms linked, happy in the touch of each other, they followed the tortuous windings of the narrow passage up the dome. Far below, the peaks were capped with delicate rose. But the rifted valleys were black and still under the falling night. Slowly they passed between the towering cliffs and up over the rough-cut steps to the summit. As they moved across the open space before the temple and seated themselves on the broad parapet of the sea wall, the sun was sinking in the west. Smoothly the great red ball dipped behind the fire-hemmed banks of clouds on the horizon and the earth lay soft and warm in the gentle after-glow. In silence they let their gaze wander out

## *THE WAKE OF THE SETTING SUN*

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across the sweeping expanse of pearl-gray ocean. Shoulder to shoulder, the supple swaying of their bodies as they breathed caressed their senses. From far below came the boom of the breakers and the breeze bore on its bosom the soothing, enervating languor of the southern seas. They talked in broken snatches, half-childish talk, meaningless except for those who hear beneath the senseless words the eternal hymn of love and life.

Gradually the salmon turned to violet, then to deepening gray, twilight floated away, and far above their heads sank down upon them the star-sown blue of a Pacific summer night. All at once, out towards the east, a luminous patch showed behind the olive-black peaks, their jagged, grim outline stood out in rugged relief, and quickly, orange and huge, the moon rose out of the range.

“What a splendid old fellow he is to-night,” Alan murmured, his voice trembling slightly. “He seems so earnest up there, trudging along in the wake of the setting sun. And you know, dear, that of all the lands and peoples those two will look upon before they come to us again they

## *THE WAKE OF THE SETTING SUN*

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are not going to find a single being quite so full of happiness as I."

The girl turned to him and her eyes, serious, tender, looked full into his own. For a moment he gripped her wrists and held her off, searching her face. Then with a stifled cry he kissed her full on the lips. There was a silence; then he drew back, sipping in his breath between his teeth.

"I love you," he whispered brokenly. "Tell me, my Paloma, that you love me."

Her closed eyes opened and she stared at him as though coming from far away. Then, putting both her arms about his neck, she pulled his mouth to hers. And, in the soft moon glow, floated up the sea wall the gentle boom of the breakers rolling in from the enchanted gardens on the other side of the globe. (1)

THE END







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